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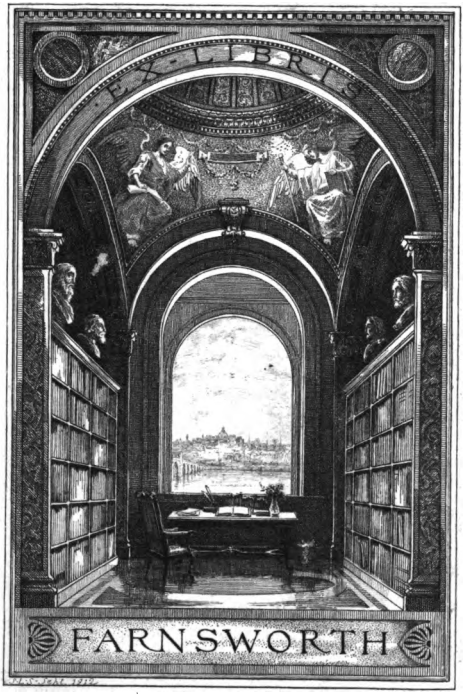

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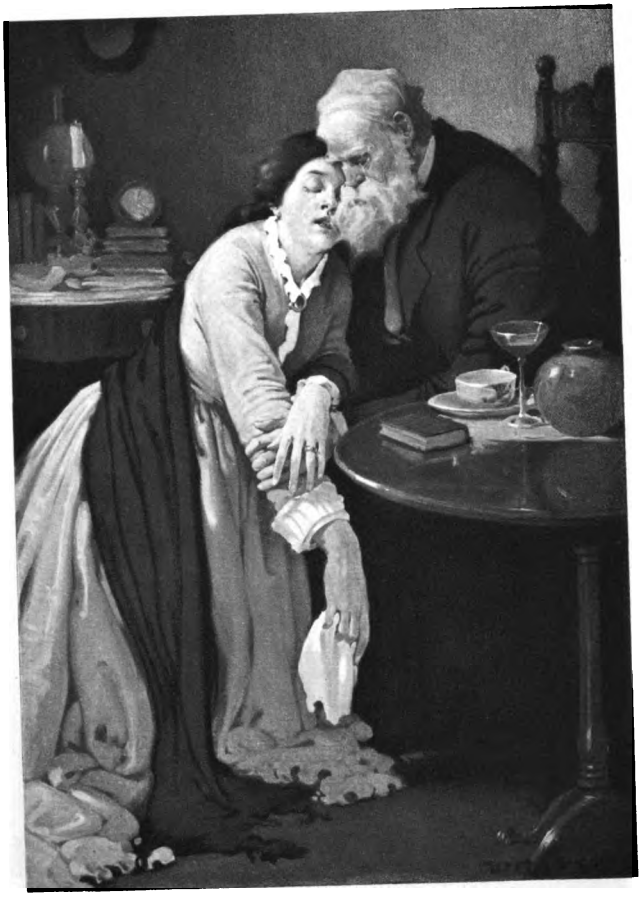

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JOHN CALDIGATE

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

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VOL. II

NEW YORK
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1911

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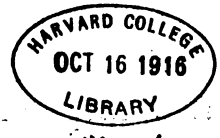

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JOHN CALDIGATE

CHAPTER I

PERSUASION

EARLY on the Tuesday morning Hester came down into the breakfast parlour at Puritan Grange, having with difficulty persuaded herself that she would stay the appointed hours in her mother's house. On the previous evening her mother had, she thought, been very hard on her, and she had determined to go. She would not stay even with her mother, if her mother insisted upon telling her that she was not her husband's wife. But during the night she was able to persuade herself to bear what had been already said, —to let it be as though it had been forgotten. Her mother was her mother. But she would bear no more. As to herself and her own conduct, her parents might say what they pleased to her. But of her husband she would endure to hear no evil word spoken. In this spirit she came down into the little parlour.

Mrs. Bolton was also up,—had been up and about for some time previous. She was a woman who never gave way to temptations of ease. A nasty dark morning at six o'clock, with just light enough to enable her to dress without a candle, with no fire and no hot water, with her husband snoring while she went through her operations, was to her thinking the proper condition of things for this world. Not to be cold, not to be uncomfortable, not to strike her toes against the furni-

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ture because she could not quite see what she was about, would to her have been to be wicked. When her daughter came into the parlour, she had been about the house for more than an hour, and had had a conference both with the cook and with the gardener. The cook was of opinion that not a word should be said, or an unusual bolt drawn, or a thing removed till the Wednesday. "She can't carry down her big box herself, ma'am; and the likes of Miss Hester would never think of going without her things;—and then there's the baby." A look of agony came across the mother's face as she heard her daughter called Miss Hester;—but in truth the woman had used the name from old association, and not with any reference to her late young mistress's present position. "I should just tell her flat on Wednesday morning that she wasn't to stir out of this, but I wouldn't say nothing at all about any of it till then." The gardener winked and nodded his head, and promised to put a stake into the ground behind the little wicket-gate which would make the opening of it impossible. "But take my word for it, ma'am, she'll never try that. She'll be a deal too proud. She'll rampage at the front door, and 'll despise any escaping like." That was the gardener's idea, and the gardener had long known the young lady. By these arguments Mrs. Bolton was induced to postpone her prison arrangements till the morrow.

When she found her daughter in the small parlour she had settled much in her mind. During the early morning,—that is, till Mr. Bolton should have gone into Cambridge,—not a word should be said about the marriage. Then when they two would be alone together, another attempt should be made to persuade Hester to come and live at Chesterton till after the

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trial. But even in making that attempt no opinion should be expressed as to John Caldigate's wickedness, and no hint should be given as to the coming incarceration. "Did you bring baby down with you?" the grandmother asked. No; baby had been awake ever so long, and then had gone to sleep again, and the nurse was now with him to protect him from the sufferings incident to waking. "Your papa will be down soon, and then we will have breakfast," said Mrs. Bolton. After that there was silence between them for some time.

A bond of discord, if the phrase may be allowed, is often quite as strong as any bond coming from concord and agreement. There was to both these women a subject of such paramount importance to each that none other could furnish matter of natural conversation. The one was saying to herself ever and always: "He is my husband. Let the outside world say what it may, he is my husband." But the other was as constantly denying to herself this assertion, and saying, "He is not her husband. Certainly he is not her husband." And as to the one the possession of that which she claimed was all the world, and as to the other the idea of the possession without true possession entailed upon her child pollution, crime, and ignominy, it was impossible but that the mind of each should be too full to admit of aught but forced expressions on other matters. It was in vain for them to attempt to talk of the garden, the house, the church, or of the old man's health. It was in vain even to attempt to talk of the baby. There are people who, however full their hearts may be, full of anger or full of joy, can keep the fulness in abeyance till a chosen time for exhibiting it shall come. But neither of these two was such a

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person. Every stiff plait in the elder woman's muslin and crape declared her conviction that John Caldigate was not legally married to her daughter. Every glance of Hester's eye, every motion made with her hands, every little shake of her head, declared her purpose of fighting for that one fact, whatever might be the odds against her.

When the banker came down to breakfast things were better for a little time. The pouring out of his tea mitigated somewhat the starchiness of his wife's severity, and Hester when cutting the loaf for him could seem to take an interest in performing an old duty. He said not a word against Caldigate; and when he went out Hester, as had been her custom, accompanied him to the gate. "Of course you will be here when I come," he said.

"Oh yes; I do not go home till to-morrow." Then she parted from him, and spent the next hour or two upstairs with her baby.

"May I come in?" said the mother.

"Oh yes, mamma. Don't you think baby is very like his father?"

"I daresay. I do not know that I am good at tracing likenesses. He certainly is like you."

"So much more like his father!" said Hester.

After that there was a pause, and then the mother commenced her task in her most serious voice. "Hester, my child, you can understand that a duty may become so imperious that it must be performed."

"Yes," said Hester, pressing her lips close together. "I can understand that." There might be a duty very necessary for her to perform, though in the performance of it she should be driven to quarrel absolutely with her own mother.

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"So it is with me. Whom do you think I love best in all the world?"

"Papa."

"I do love your father dearly, and I endeavour, by God's grace, to do my duty by him, though, I fear, it is done imperfectly. But, my child, our hearts, I think, yearn more to those who are younger than ourselves than to our elders. We love best those whom we have cherished and protected, and whom we may perhaps still cherish and protect. When I try to tear my heart away from the things of this vile world, it clings to you—to you—to you!"

Of course this could not be borne without an embrace. "Oh, mamma!" Hester exclaimed, throwing herself on her knees before her mother's lap.

"If you suffer, must not I suffer? If you rejoice, would I not fain rejoice with you if I could? Did I not bring you into the world, my only one, and nursed you, and prayed for you, and watched you with all a mother's care as you grew up among the troubles of the world? Have you not known that my heart has been too soft towards you even for the due performance of my duties?"

"You have always been good to me, mamma."

"And am I altered now? Do you think that a mother's heart can be changed to her only child?"

"No, mamma."

"No, Hester. That, I think, is impossible. Though for the last twelvemonths I have not seen you day by day, though I have not prepared the food which you eat and the clothes which you wear, as I used to do, you have been as constantly in my mind. You are still my child, my only child."

"Mamma, I know you love me."

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"I so love you as to know that I sin in so loving aught that is human. And so loving you, must I not do my duty by you? When love and duty both compel me to speak, how shall I be silent?"

"You have said it, mamma," said Hester, slowly drawing herself up from off the ground.

"And is saying it once enough when, as I think, the very soul, the immortal soul, of her who is of all the dearest to me depends on what I may say;—may be saved, or, oh, perhaps lost for ever by the manner in which I may say it! How am I not to speak when such thoughts as these are heavy within me?"

"What is it you would say?" This Hester asked with a low hoarse voice and a stern look, as though she could not resist her mother's prayer for the privilege of speaking; but at the same time was resolutely prepared not to be turned a hair's-breadth by anything that might be said.

"Not a word about him."

"No, mamma; no. Unless you can tell me that you will love him as your son-in-law."

"Not a word about him," she repeated, in a harsher voice. She felt that that promise should have been enough, and that in the present circumstances she should not have been invited to love the man she hated. "Your father and I wish you for the next few months to come and live with us."

"It is quite impossible," said Hester, standing very upright, with a face altogether unlike that she had worn when kneeling at her mother's knees.

"You should listen to me."

"Yes, I will listen."

"There will be a trial."

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"Undoubtedly. John, at least, seems to think so. It is possible that these wicked people may give it up, or that they may have no money to go on; but I suppose there will be a trial."

"The woman has bound herself to prosecute him."

"Because she wants to get money. But we need not discuss that, mamma. John thinks that there will be a trial."

"Till that is over, will you not be better away from him? How will it be with you if it should be decided that he is not your husband?" Here Hester of course prepared herself for interruption, but her mother prayed for permission to continue. "Listen to me for one moment, Hester."

"Very well, mamma. Go on."

"How would it be with you in that case? You must be separated then? As that is possible, is it not right that you should obey the ordinances of God and man, and keep yourself apart till they who are in authority shall have spoken?"

"There are no such ordinances."

"There are indeed. If you were to ask all your friends, all the married women in Cambridgeshire, what would they say? Would they not all tell you that no woman should live with a man while there is a shadow of doubt? And as to the law of God, you know God's law, and can only defend yourself by your own certainty as to a matter respecting which all others are uncertain. You think yourself certain because such certainty is a way to yourself out of your present misery."

"It is for my child," she shouted; "and for him."

"As for your babe, your darling babe, whether he be yours in joy of heart or in agony of spirit, he is

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still yours. No one will rob you of him. If it be as we fear, would not I help you to love him, help you to care for him, help you to pray for him? If it were so, would I desert him or you because in your innocence you had been betrayed into misfortune? Do I not feel for your child? But when he grows up and is a man, and will have learned the facts of his early years, let him be able to tell himself that his mother though unfortunate was pure."

"I am pure," she said.

"My child, my own one, can I, your mother, think aught else of you? Do I not know your heart? Do not I know the very thoughts within you?"

"I am pure. He has become my husband, and nothing can divide us. I never gave a thought to another man. I never had the faintest liking, as do other girls. When he came and told me that he had seen me and loved me, and would take me for his wife, I felt at once that I was all his,—his to do as he liked with me, his to nourish him, his to worship him, his to obey him, his to love him let father or mother or all the world say what they would to the contrary. Then we were married. Till he was my own, I never even pressed my lips upon his. But I became his wife by a bond that nothing shall break. You tell me of God's law. By God's law I am his wife, let the people say what they will. I have but two to think of."

"Yourself and him?" asked her mother.

"I have three to think of,—God, and him, and my child; and may God be good to me and them, as in this matter I will put myself away from myself altogether. It is for me to obey him, and I will submit myself to none other. If he bids me go, I will go;

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if he bids me stay here, I will stay. I have become his so entirely, that no judges—no judges can divide us. Judges! I know but one Judge, and He is there; and He has said that those whom He has joined together, man shall not put asunder. Pure! pure! No one should praise herself, but as a woman I do know that I am pure."

Then the mother's heart yearned greatly towards her daughter; and yet she was no whit changed. She knew nothing of phrases of logic, but she felt that Hester had begged the whole question. Those whom God had joined together! True, true! If only one could know whether in this or the other case God had joined the couple. As Hester argued the matter, no woman should be taken from the man she had married, though he might have a dozen other wives all living. And she spoke of purity as though it were a virtue which could be created and consecrated simply by the action of her own heart, as though nothing outside,—no ceremony, no ordinance,—could affect it. The same argument would enable her to live with John Caldigate after he should come out of prison, even though, as would then be the case, another woman would have the legal right of calling herself Mrs. John Caldigate! On the previous day she had declared that if she could not be his wife, she would be his mistress. The mother knew what she meant,—that, let the people call her by what name they might, she would still be her husband's wife in the eye of God. But she would not be so. And then she would not be pure. And, to Mrs. Bolton, the worst of it was that this cloudiness had come upon her daughter,—this incapacity to reason it out,—because the love of a human being had become so strong within her bosom as to have superseded and choked the love of

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heavenly things. But how should she explain all this? "I am not asking you to drop his name."

"Drop his name! I will never drop it. I cannot drop it. It is mine. I could not make myself anything but Mrs. John Caldigate if I would. And he," she said, taking the baby up from its cradle and pressing it to her bosom, "he shall be Daniel Caldigate to the day of his death. Do you think that I will take a step that shall look like robbing my child of his honest name,—that will seem to imply a doubt that he is not his own father's honest boy,—that he is not a fitting heir to the property which his forefathers have owned so long? Never! They may call me what name they will, but I will call myself John Caldigate's wife as long as I have a voice to make myself heard."

It was the same protest over and over again, and it was vain to answer. "You will not stay under your father's roof?"

"No; I have to live under my husband's roof." Then Mrs. Bolton left the room, apparently in anger. Though her heart within might be melting with ruth, still it was necessary that she should assume a look of anger. On the morrow she would have to show herself angry with a vengeance, if she should then still be determined to carry out her plan. And she thought that she was determined. What had pity to do with it, or love, or moving heart-stirring words? Were not all these things temptations from the Evil One, if they were allowed to interfere with the strict line of hard duty? When she left the room, where the young mother was still standing with her baby in her arms, she doubted for some minutes,—perhaps for some half hour,—then she wrestled with those emanations from the Evil One, —with pity, with love, and suasive tenderness,—and

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at last overcame them. "I know I am pure," the daughter had said. "I know I am right," said the mother.

But she spoke a word to her husband when he came home. "I cannot bend her; I cannot turn her, in the least."

"She will not stay?"

"Not of her own accord."

"You have told her?"

"Oh no; not till to-morrow."

"She ought to stay, certainly," said the father. There had been very little intercourse between the mother and daughter during the afternoon, and while the three were sitting together, nothing was said about the morrow. The evening would have seemed to be very sad and very silent, had they not all three been used to so many silent evenings in that room. Hester, during her wedding tour and the few weeks of her happiness at Folking, before the trouble had come, had felt a new life and almost an ecstasy of joy in the thorough liveliness of her husband. But the days of her old home were not so long ago that its old manners should seem strange to her. She therefore sat out the hours patiently, stitching some baby's ornament, till her mother told her that the time for prayer had come. After worship her father called her out into the hall as he went up to his room. "Hester," he said, "it is not right that you should leave us to-morrow."

"I must, papa."

"I tell you that it is not right. You have a home in which everybody will respect you. For the present you should remain here."

"I cannot, papa. He told me to go back to-morrow. I would not disobey him now,—not now,—were it ever

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so." Then the old man paused as though he were going on with the argument, but finding that he had said all that he had to say, he slowly made his way upstairs.

"Good-night, mamma," said Hester, returning only to the door of the sitting-room.

"Good-night, my love." As the words were spoken they both felt that there was something wrong,—much that was wrong. "I do not think they will do that," said Hester to herself, as she went up the stairs to her chamber.

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CHAPTER II

VIOLENCE

It had been arranged at Folking, before Hester had started, that Caldigate himself should drive the waggonette into Cambridge to take her back on the Wednesday, but that he would bring a servant with him who should drive the carriage up to the Grange, so that he, personally, should not have to appear at the door of the house. He would remain at Mr. Seely's, and then the waggonette should pick him up. This had been explained to Mrs. Bolton. "John will remain in town, because he has so much to do with Mr. Seely," Hester had said; "and Richard will call here at about twelve." All her plans had thus been made known, and Mrs. Bolton was aware at what hour the bolts must be drawn and the things removed.

But, as the time drew nearer, her dislike to a sudden commencement of absolute hostilities became stronger,—to hostilities which would seem to have no sanction from Mr. Bolton himself, because he would then be absent. And he too, though as he lay awake through the dreary hours of the long night he said no word about the plan, felt, and felt more strongly as the dawn was breaking, that it would be mean to leave his daughter with a farewell kiss, knowing as he would do that he was leaving her within prison-bars, leaving her to the charge of jailers. The farewell kiss would be given as though he and she were to meet no more

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in her old home till this terrible trial should be over, and some word appropriate to such a parting would then be spoken. But any such parting word would be false, and the falsehood would be against his own child! "Does she expect it?" he said, in a low voice, when his wife came up to him as he was dressing.

"She expects nothing. I am thinking that perhaps you would tell her that she could not go to-day."

"I could not say 'to-day.' If I tell her anything, I must tell her all."

"Will not that be best?" Then the old man thought it all over. It would be very much the best for him not to say anything about it if he could reconcile it to his conscience to leave the house without doing so. And he knew well that his wife was more powerful than he,—gifted with greater persistence, more capable of enduring a shower of tears or a storm of anger. The success of the plan would be more probable if the conduct of it were left entirely to his wife, but his conscience was sore within him.

"You will come with me to the gate," he said to his daughter, after their silent breakfast.

"Oh yes;—to say good-bye."

Then he took his hat, and his gloves, and his umbrella, very slowly, lingering in the hall as he did so, while his wife kept her seat firm and square at the breakfast table. Hester had her hat and shawl with her; but Mrs. Bolton did not suspect that she would endeavour to escape now without returning for her child. Therefore she sat firm and square, waiting to hear from Hester herself what her father might bring himself to communicate to her. "Hester," he said, as he slowly walked round the sweep in front of the house, "Hester," he said, "you would do your duty

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best to God and man,—best to John Caldigate and to your child,—by remaining here."

"How can I unless he tells me?"

"You have your father's authority."

"You surrendered it when you gave me to him as his wife. It is not that I would rebel against you, papa, but that I must obey him. Does not St. Paul say, 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord'?"

"Certainly; and you cannot suppose that in any ordinary case I would interfere between you and him. It is not that I am anxious to take anything from him that belongs to him." Then, as they were approaching the gate, he stood still. "But now, in such an emergency as this, when a question has risen as to his power of making you his wife——"

"I will not hear of that. I am his wife."

"Then it may become my duty and your mother's to—to—to provide you with a home till the law shall have decided."

"I cannot leave his home unless he bids me."

"I am telling you of my duty—of my duty and your mother's." Then he passed out through the gate, thus having saved his conscience from the shame of a false farewell; and she slowly made her way back to the house, after standing for a moment to look after him as he went. She was almost sure now that something was intended. He would not have spoken in that way of his duty unless he had meant her to suppose that he intended to perform it. "My duty," he had said, "my duty and your mother's!" Of course something was intended, something was to be done or said more than had been done or said already. During the breakfast she had seen in the curves of her mother's mouth the

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signs of some resolute purpose. During the very prayers she had heard in her mother's voice a sound as of a settled determination. She knew,—she knew that something was to be done, and with that knowledge she went back into her mother's room, and sat herself down firmly and squarely at the table. She had left her cup partly full, and began again to drink her tea. "What did your papa say to you?" asked her mother.

"Papa bade me stay here, but I told him that most certainly I should go home to Folking." Then Mrs. Bolton also became aware of fixed will and resolute purpose on her daughter's part.

"Does his word go for nothing?"

"How can two persons' words go for anything when obedience is concerned? It is like God and Mammon."

"Hester!"

"If two people tell one differently, it must be right to cling to one and leave the other. No man can serve two masters. I have got to obey my husband. Even were I to say that I would stay, he could come and take me away."

"He could not do that."

"I shall not be so disobedient as to make it necessary. The carriage will be here at twelve, and I shall go. I had better go and help nurse to put the things up." So saying she left the room, but Mrs. Bolton remained there a while, sitting square and firm at the table.

It was not yet ten when she slowly followed her daughter upstairs. She first went into her own room for a moment, to collect her thoughts over again, and then she walked across the passage to her daughter's chamber. She knocked at the door, but entered as she

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knocked. "Nurse," she said, "will you go into my room for a minute or two, I wish to speak to your mistress. May she take the baby, Hester?" The baby was taken, and then the two were alone. "Do not pack up your things to-day, Hester."

"Why not?"

"You are not going to-day."

"I am going to-day, mamma."

"That I should seem to be cruel to you,—only seem,—cuts me to the heart. But you cannot go back to Folking to-day."

"When am I to go?"

"Ah, Hester!"

"Tell me what you mean, mamma. Is it that I am to be a prisoner?"

"If you would be gentle I would explain it."

"I will not be gentle. You mean to keep me,—by violence; but I mean to go; my husband will come. I will not be kept. Oh, mamma, you would not desire me to quarrel with you openly, before the servants, before all the world! I will not be kept. I will certainly go back to Folking. Would I not go back though I had to get through the windows, to walk the whole way, to call upon the policeman even to help me?"

"No one will help you, Hester. Everyone will know that for the present this should be your home."

"It never shall be my home again," said Hester, bursting into tears, and rushing after her baby.

Then there were two hours of intense misery in that house,—of misery to all who were concerned. The servants, down to the girl in the scullery and the boy who cleaned the boots, were made aware that master and mistress were both determined to keep their mar-

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ried daughter a prisoner in the house. The servants of the house sided with their mistress generally, having all of them been induced to regard John Caldigate with horror. Hester's nurse of course sympathised with her and her baby. During these two hours the packing was completed, but Hester found that her strong walking-boots and her bonnet had been abstracted. Did they really think that at such a time as this boots and bonnets would be anything to her? They could know nothing of her nature. They could not understand the sort of combat she would carry on if an attempt were made to take from her her liberty,—an attempt made by those who had by law no right to control her! When once she had learned what was being done she would not condescend to leave her room till the carriage should have come. That that would come punctually at twelve she was sure. Then she would go down without her bonnet and without her boots, and see whether anyone would dare to stand in her way, as with her baby in her arms she would attempt to walk forth through the front door.

But it had not occurred to her that other steps might be taken. Just before twelve the gardener stationed himself on the road before the house,—a road which was half lane and half street, belonging to the suburban village of Chesterton,—and there awaited the carriage at a spot some yards away from the gate. It was well that he was early, because Richard was there a few minutes before the time appointed. "She ain't a-going back to-day," said the gardener, laying his hands gently on the horse's back.

"Who ain't a-going back?" asked the coachman.

"Miss Hester ain't."

"Mrs. John ain't a-going home?"

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"No;—I was to come out and tell you, as master don't like wheels on the gravel if it can be helped. We ain't got none of our own."

"Missus ain't a-going home? Why, master expects her for certain!"

"I was to say she ain't a-going to-day."

The man who was driving passed the reins into his whip-hand, and raising his hat, began to scratch his head with the other. He knew at once that there was something wrong,—that this prolonged staying away from home was not merely a pleasantly lengthened visit. His master had been very urgent with him as to punctuality, and was evidently intent upon the return of his wife. All the facts of the accusation were known to the man, and the fact also that his master's present wife was entirely in accord with his master. It could not be that she should have determined to prolong her visit, and then have sent him back to her husband with such a message as this! "If you'll hold the hosses just a minute," he said, "I'll go in and see my missus."

But the Grange gardener was quite as intent on his side of the question as was the Folking coachman on the other. To him the horrors of bigamy were manifest. He was quite of the opinion that "Miss Hester," —who never ought to have been married in that way at all,—should now be kept a prisoner in her father's house. "It ain't no use your going in,—and you can't," said the gardener. "I ain't a-going to hold the horses, and there's nobody as will."

"What's up, mate?"

"I don't know as I'm mate to you, nor yet to no one like you. And as to what's up, I've told you all as I'm bade to tell you; and I ain't a-going to tell you no more. You can't turn your horses there. You'd

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better drive round into the village, and there you'll get the high-road back to Cambridge." Then the gardener retreated within a little gate of his own which led from the lane into the precincts close to his own cottage. The man was an honest, loyal old fanatic, who would scruple at nothing in carrying out the orders of his mistress in so good a cause. And personally his feelings had been acerbated in that he had been called "mate" by a man not half his age.

The coachman did as he was bid, seeing before him no other possible course. He could not leave his horses. But when he was in front of the iron gates he stopped and examined the premises. The gates were old, and were opened and closed at ordinary times by an ordinary ancient lock. But now there was a chain passed in and out with a padlock,—evidently placed there to prevent him from entering in opposition to the gardener's instructions. There was clearly no course open to him but to drive the carriage back to his master.

At a quarter before twelve Hester left her own room,—which looked backwards into the garden, as did all the pleasanter rooms of the house,—with the intention of seating herself in a spare room looking out to the front, from which she could have seen the carriage as it entered the gate. Had she so seen it she would certainly have called to the man from the window when he was standing in the road. But the door of that front room was locked against her; and when she tried the other she found that all the front rooms were locked. She knew the house, of course, as well as did her mother, and she rushed up to the attics where the servants occupied the rooms looking out to the road. But they, too, were locked against

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her. Then it flashed upon her that the attempt to make her a prisoner was to be carried out through every possible detail.

What should she do? Her husband would come of course; but what if he were unable to force an entrance? And how could he force it? Would the police help him? Would the magistrates help him? She knew that the law was on her side, and on his,—that the law would declare him to be her lord and owner till the law should have separated them. But would the law allow itself to be used readily for this purpose? She, too, could understand that the feeling of the community would be against her, and that in such a case the law might allow itself to become slow, lethargic, and perhaps inoperative, yielding to the popular feeling. She saw the points which were strong against her as clearly as William and Robert Bolton had seen those which were strong on their side. But——! As she stood there beating her foot angrily on the floor of the passage, she made up her mind that there should be more than one "but" in his favour. If they kept her, they should have to lock her up as in a dungeon; they and all the neighbourhood should hear her voice. They should be driven to do such things that the feeling of the community would be no longer on their side.

Various ideas passed through her mind. She thought for a moment that she would refuse to take any nourishment in that house. Her mother would surely not see her die; and would thus have to see her die or else send her forth to be fed. But that thought stayed with her but for a moment. It was not only for herself that she must eat and drink, but for her baby. Then, finding that she could not get to the front windows, and

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seeing that the time had come in which the carriage should have been there, she went down into the hall, where she found her mother seated on a high-backed old oak arm-chair. The windows of the hall looked out on to the sweep before the house; but she was well aware that from these lower windows the plot of shrubs in the centre of the space hindered any view of the gate. Without speaking to her mother she put her hand upon the lock of the door as though to walk forth, but found it barred. "Am I a prisoner?" she said.

"Yes, Hester; yes. If you will use such a word as to your father's house, you are a prisoner."

"I will not remain so. You will have to chain me, and to gag me, and to kill me. Oh, my baby,—oh my child! Nurse, nurse, bring me my boy." Then with her baby in her arms, she sat down in another high-backed oak arm-chair, looking at the hall-door. There she would sit till her husband should come. He surely would come. He would make his way up to those windows, and there she could at any rate hear his commands. If he came for her, surely she would be able to escape.

The coachman drove back to the town very quickly, and went to the inn at which his horses were generally put up, thinking it better to go to his master thence on foot. But there he found John Caldigate, who had come across from Mr. Seely's office. "Where is Mrs. Caldigate?" he said, as the man drove the empty carriage down the entrance to the yard. The man, touching his hat, and with a motion of his hand which was intended to check his master's impetuosity, drove on; and then, when he had freed himself from the charge of his horses, told his story with many whispers.

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"The gardener said she wasn't to come!"

"Just that, sir. There's something up more than you think, sir; there is indeed. He was that fractious that he wouldn't hold the hosses for me, not for a minute, till I could go in and see, and then——"

"Well?"

"The gates was chained, sir."

"Chained?"

"A chain was round the bars, and a padlock. I never see such a thing on a gentleman's gate in my life before. Chained; as nobody wasn't to go in, nor yet nobody wasn't to come out!" The man as he said this wore that air of dignity which is always imparted by the possession of great tidings the truth of which will certainly not be doubted.

The tidings were great. The very thing which his father had suggested, and which he had declared to be impossible, was being done. The old banker himself would not, he thought, have dared to propose and carry out such a project. The whole Bolton family had conspired together to keep his wife from him, and had allured her away by the false promise of a friendly visit! He knew, too, that the law was on his side; but he knew also that he might find it very difficult to make use of the law. If the world of Cambridge chose to think that Hester was not his wife, the world of Cambridge would probably support the Boltons by their opinion. But if she, if his Hester, were true to him, and she certainly would be true to him—and if she were as courageous as he believed her to be,—then, as he thought, no house in Chesterton would be able to hold her.

He stood for a moment turning in his mind what he

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had better do. Then he gave his orders to the man in a clear natural voice. "Take the horses out, Richard, and feed them. You had better get your dinner here, so that I may be sure to find you here the moment I want you."

"I won't stir a step from the place," said the man,

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CHAPTER III

IN PRISON

WHAT should he do? John Caldigate, as he walked out of the inn-yard, had to decide for himself what he would do at once. His first impulse was to go to the mayor and ask for assistance. He had a right to the custody of his wife. Her father had no right to make her a prisoner. She was entitled to go whither she pleased, so long as she had his sanction; and should she be separated from him by the action of the law, she would be entitled to go whither she pleased without sanction from anyone. Whether married or unmarried she was not subject to her father. The husband was sure that he was entitled to the assistance of the police, but he doubted much whether he would be able to get it, and he was most averse to ask for it.

And yet what other step could he take? With no purpose yet quite fixed, he went to the bank, thinking that he might best commence his work by expostulating with his wife's father. It was Mr. Bolton's habit to walk every morning into the town, unless he was deterred by heat or wet or ill health; and till lately it had been his habit also to walk back, his house being a mile and a half distant from the bank; but latterly the double walk had become too much for him, and, when the time for his return came, he would send out for a cab to take him home. His hours were very various. He would generally lunch at the bank, in his

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own little dingy room; but if things went badly with him, so as to disturb his mind, he would go back early in the day, and generally pass the afternoon asleep. On this occasion he was very much troubled, so that when Caldigate reached the bank, which he did before one, Mr. Bolton was already getting into his cab. "Could I speak a few words to you, sir?" said Caldigate in the street.

"I am not very well to-day," said the banker, hardly looking round, persevering in his effort to get in to the vehicle.

"I would not keep you for a minute, sir. I must see you, as you are aware."

There were already half-a-dozen people collected, all of whom had no doubt heard the story of John Caldigate's wife. There was, indeed, no man or woman in Cambridge whose ears it had not reached. In the hearing of these Mr. Bolton was determined not to speak of his daughter, and he was equally determined not to go back into the house. "I have nothing to say," he muttered—"nothing, nothing; drive on." So the cab was driven on, and John Caldigate was left in the street.

The man's anger now produced a fixed purpose, and with a quick step he walked away from the bank to Robert Bolton's office. There he soon found himself in the attorney's room. "Are you aware of what they are doing at the Grange?" he asked, in a voice which was not so guarded as it should have been on such an occasion. Anger and the quickness of his walk had combined to make him short of breath, and he asked the question with that flurried, hasty manner which is common to angry people who are hot rather than malicious in their angers.

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"I don't think I am," said the attorney. "But if I were, I doubt whether I should just at present be willing to discuss their doings with you."

"My wife has gone there on a visit."

"I am glad to hear it. It is the best thing that my sister could do."

"And now it seems some difficulty is made about her returning."

"That I think very likely. Her father and mother can hardly wish that she should go back to your house at present. I cannot imagine that she should wish it herself. If you have the feelings of a gentleman or the heart of a man you ought not to wish it."

"I have not come here to be taught what is becoming either to a man or a gentleman."

"If you will allow me to say so, while things are as they are at present, you ought not to come here at all."

"I should not have done so but for this violence, this breach of all hospitality at your father's house. My wife went there with the understanding that she was to stay for two days."

"And now, you say, they detain her. I am not responsible; but in doing so they have my thorough sympathy and approbation. I do not know that I can help them, or that they will want my help; but I shall help them if I can. The fact is, you had better leave her there."

"Never!"

"I should not have volunteered my advice, but, as you are here, I may perhaps say a word. If you attempt to take her by violence from her father's house you will have all the town, all the county, all England against you."

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"I should;—I own it;—unless she wished to come to me. If she chooses to stay, she shall stay."

"It must not be left to her. If she be so infatuated, she must not be allowed to judge for herself. Till this trial be over, she and you must live apart. Then, if that woman does not make good her claim,—if you can prove that the woman is lying,—then you will have back your wife. But if, as everybody I find believes at present, it should be proved that you are the husband of that woman, and that you have basely betrayed my poor sister by a mock marriage, then she must be left to the care of her father and her mother, and may Heaven help her in her misery." All this he said with much dignity, and in a manner with which even Caldigate could not take personal offence. "You must remember," he added, "that this poor injured one is their daughter and my sister."

"I say that she has been in no wise injured but,—as I also am injured,—by a wicked plot. And I say that she shall come back to me, unless she herself elects to remain with her parents." Then he left the office and went forth again into the streets.

He now took at once the road to Chesterton, trying as he did so to make for himself in his own mind a plan or map of the premises. It would, he thought, be impossible but that his wife would be able to get out of the house and come to him if he could only make her aware of his presence. But then there was the baby, and it would be necessary not only that she should escape herself but that she should bring her child with her. Would they attempt to hold her? Could it be that they should have already locked her up in some room upstairs? And if she did escape out of some window, even with her baby in her arms, how would it

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be with them then as they made their way back into the town? Thinking of this he hurried back to the inn and told Richard to take the carriage into Chesterton and wait there at the turn of the lane, where the lane leads down from the main road to the Grange. He was to wait there, though it might be all the day, till he heard from or saw his master. The man, who was quite as keen for his master as was the old gardener for his mistress on the other side, promised accurate obedience. Then he retraced his steps and walked as fast as he could to the Grange.

During all this time the mother and the daughter kept their weary seats in the hall, Hester having her baby in her arms. She had quite determined that nothing should induce her again to go upstairs,—lest the key of the room should be turned upon her. For a long time they sat in silence, and then she declared her purpose.

"I shall remain here, mamma."

"If so, I must remain too."

"I shall not go up to my bedroom again, you may be sure of that."

"You will go up to-night, I hope."

"Certainly not. Nurse shall take baby up to his cradle. I do not suppose you will be cruel enough to separate me from my child."

"Cruel! Do you not know that I would do anything for you or your child,—that I would die for you or your child?"

"I suppose you will let them bring me food here. You would not wish him to be starved."

"Hester!"

"Well; what would you have me say? Are you not my jailer?"

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"I am your mother. According to my conscience I am acting for you as best I know how. Do you not know that I mean to be good to you?"

"I know you are not good to me. Nobody can be good who tries to separate me from my husband. I shall remain here till he comes and tells me how I am to be taken away." Then Mr. Bolton returned, and made his way into the house with the assistance of the gardener through the kitchen. He found the two women sitting in the hall, each in the high-backed arm-chair, and his daughter with her baby in her arms,—a most piteous sight, the two of them thus together. "Papa," she said, as he came up into the hall from the kitchen, "you are treating me badly, cruelly, unjustly. You have no right to keep me here against my will. I am my husband's wife, and I must go to my husband."

"It is for the best, Hester."

"What is wrong cannot be for the best. Do you suppose that he will let me be kept here in prison? Of course he will come. Why do you not let me go?"

"It is right that you should be here, Hester," he said, as he passed upstairs to his own bedroom. It was a terrible job of work for which he had no strength whatever himself, and as to which he was beginning to doubt whether even his wife's strength would suffice. As for her, as for Hester, perhaps it would be well that she should be wearied and broken into submission. But it was fearful to think that his wife should have to sit there the whole day saying nothing, doing nothing, merely watching lest her daughter should attempt to escape through some window.

"It will kill your father, I think," said the mother.

"Why does he not let me go then? I have to think of my husband and my child." Then again there was

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silence. When they had been seated thus for two hours, all the words that had been spoken between them had not spread themselves over ten minutes, and Mrs. Bolton was looking forward to hour after hour of the same kind. It did not seem to her to be possible that Hester should be forced up into her own room. Even she, with all her hardihood, could not ask the men about the place to take her in their arms and carry her with violence up the stairs. Nor would the men have done it, if so required. Nothing but a policeman's garb will seem to justify the laying of a hand upon a woman, and even that will hardly do it unless the woman be odiously disreputable. Mrs. Bolton saw clearly what was before her. Should Hester be strong in her purpose to remain seated as at present, she also must remain seated. Weariness and solicitude for her baby might perhaps drive the young mother to bed. Then she also would go to her bed,—and would rest, with one eye ever open, with her ears always on the alert. She was somewhat sure of herself. Her life had not been so soft but that she could endure much,—and of her purpose she was quite sure. Nothing would trouble her conscience if she could succeed in keeping her daughter separated from John Caldigate.

Caldigate in his hot haste walked up to the iron gates and found them chained. It was in vain that he shook them, and in vain that he looked at them. The gates were fully twelve feet high, and spiked at the top. At each side of the gates ran a wall surmounted by iron railings,—extending to the gardener's cottage on the one side, and to the coach-house on the other. The drive up to the house, which swept round a plot of thick shrubs, lay between the various offices,—the stables and coach-house being on one side, and the laundry and

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gardener's cottage on the other. From the road there was no mode of ingress for him to this enclosure, unless he could get over the railings. This might perhaps have been possible, but it would have been quite impossible for him to bring his wife back by the same way. There was a bell at the gardener's little gate, which he rang loudly; but no one would come to him. At last he made his way round into the kitchen-garden by a corner where access was made by climbing a moderately high gate which gave an entrance to the fields. From thence he had no difficulty in making his way on to the lawn at the back of the house, and up by half-a-dozen stone steps to the terrace which ran along under the windows. Here he found that the lower shutters were barred on the inside throughout, so that he could not look into any of the rooms. But he could rap at the windows, which he did loudly, and it was in his power to break them if he pleased. He rapped very loudly; but poor Hester, who sat at the front hall, heard nothing of the noise.

He knew that from the back-garden he could make his way to the front, with more or less of violence. Between the gardener's cottage and the laundry there was a covered passage leading to the front, the buildings above being continuous, but leaving a way through for the convenience of the servants. This, however, was guarded by a trellis-work gate. But even on this gate the gardener had managed to fix a lock. When Caldigate reached the spot the man was standing, idle and observant, at his own cottage door. "You had better open this gate," said Caldigate, "or I shall kick it open."

"You mustn't do that, Mr. Caldigate. It's master's orders as it's to be locked. It's master's orders as you

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ain't to be in here at all." Then Caldigate raised his foot, and the trellis-work gate was very soon despatched. "Very well," said the man;—"very well, Mr. Caldigate. That'll have to come agin you when the other things come. It's my belief as it's burglorious." Then Caldigate went up before the house windows, and the gardener followed him.

The front door was approached by half-a-dozen stone steps, which were guarded on each side by a curved iron rail. Along the whole front of the house, passing under the steps, there ran a narrow, shallow area, contrived simply to give light to the kitchen and offices in the basement storey. But this area was, again, guarded by an iron rail, which was so constructed as to make it impossible that anyone less expert than a practised house-breaker should get in or out of any of the windows looking that way. From the hall there were no less than four windows looking to the front; but they were all equally unapproachable.

The moment that Caldigate appeared coming round the curve of the gravel road Hester saw him. Jumping up from her chair with her baby, she rushed to the window, and called to him aloud, tapping at the window as she did so, "John, I am here! Come to me! come to me! Take me out! They have shut me in, and will not let me come to you." Then she held up the baby. "Mamma, let him in, so that he come to his own baby. You dare not keep the father away from his own child." At this time the nurse was in the hall, as was also the cook. But the front door was locked as well as chained, and the key was in Mrs. Bolton's own pocket. She sat perfectly silent, rigid, without a motion. She had known that he would come and show himself; and she had determined that she would be

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rigid, silent, and motionless. She would not move or speak unless Hester should endeavour to make her way down into the kitchen. But just in the passage which led to the top of the kitchen stairs stood the cook,—strong, solid, almost twice the weight of Hester,—a pious, determined woman, on whom her mistress could depend that she would remain there impervious.

They could talk to each other now, Hester and Caldigate, each explaining or suggesting what had been done or should be done; but they could converse only so that their enemies around them should hear every word that was spoken. "No, John, no; I will not stay," she said, when her husband told her that he would leave the decision to her. "Unless it be to do your bidding, I will not stay here willingly. And, John, I will not move upstairs. I will remain here; and if they choose to give me food they may bring it to me. Unless they carry me I will not go to my bedroom. And they shall tear me to pieces before I will let them carry me. Poor baby! poor baby! I know he will be ill," she said, moaning, but still so that he, standing beyond the railings, should hear her through the window. "I know he will be ill; but what can I do? They do not care for my baby. If he should die it will be nothing to them." During all this Mrs. Bolton kept her resolve, and sat there rigid, with her eyes fixed on vacancy, speaking no word, apparently paying no attention to the scene around her. Her back was turned to the front door, so that she could not see John Caldigate. Nor would she attempt to look at him. He could not get in, nor could the other get out. If that were so she would endeavour to bear it all. In the meantime the old man was sitting in his arm-chair up in his bedroom, reduced almost to inanity of mind by the horror of the

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occasion. When he could think of it all he would tell himself that he must let her go. He could not keep the mother and her baby a prisoner in such a condition as this.

Then there came dinner. Let misfortunes be what they may, dinner will come. The old man crawled downstairs, and Hester was invited into the dining-room. "No," she said. "If you choose to send it to me here, because of baby, I will eat." Then, neither would Mrs. Bolton go to her husband; but both of them, seated in their high-backed arm-chairs, ate their food with their plates upon their laps.

During this time Caldigate still remained outside, but in vain. As circumstances were at present he had no means of approaching his wife. He could kick down a slight trellis-work gate; but he could bring no adequate force to bear against the stout front door. At last, when the dusk of evening came on he took his departure, assuring his wife that he would be there again on the following morning.

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CHAPTER IV

THE ESCAPE

DURING the whole of that night Hester kept her position in the hall, holding her baby in her arms as long as the infant would sleep in that position, and then allowing the nurse to take it to its cradle upstairs. And during the whole night also Mrs. Bolton remained with her daughter. Tea was brought to them, which each of them took, and after that neither spoke a word to the other till the morning. Before he went to bed, Mr. Bolton came down and made an effort for their joint comfort. "Hester," he said, "why should you not go to your room? You can do yourself no good by remaining there."

"No," she said, sullenly; "no; I will stay."

"You will only make yourself ill,—you and your mother."

"She can go. Though I should die, I will stay here."

Nor could he succeed better with his wife. "If she is obstinate, so must I be," said Mrs. Bolton. It was in vain that he endeavoured to prove to her that there could be no reason for such obstinacy, that her daughter would not attempt to escape during the hours of the night without her baby.

"You would not do that," said the old man, turning to his daughter. But to this Hester would make no reply, and Mrs. Bolton simply declared her purpose of remaining. To her mind there was present an idea that

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she would, at any rate, endure as much actual suffering as her daughter. There they both sat, and in the morning they were objects pitiable to be seen.

Macbeth and Sancho have been equally eloquent in the praise of sleep. "Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleave of care!" But sleep will knit up effectually no broken stitches unless it be enjoyed in bed. "Blessings on him who invented sleep," said Sancho. But the great inventor was he who discovered mattresses and sheets and blankets. These two unfortunates no doubt slept; but in the morning they were weary, comfortless, and exhausted. Towels and basins were brought to them, and then they prepared themselves to watch through another day. It seemed to be a trial between them, which could outwatch the other. The mother was, of course, much the older; but with poor Hester there was the baby to add to her troubles. Never was there a woman more determined to carry out her purpose than Mrs. Bolton, or one more determined to thwart the purpose of another than she who still called herself Hester Caldigate. In the morning Mrs. Bolton implored her husband to go into Cambridge as usual; but he felt that he could not leave the house with such inmates. So he sat in his bedroom dozing wretchedly in his arm-chair.

Caldigate appeared before the house at nine o'clock, no further attempt having been made to exclude his entrance by the side gate, and asked to see Mr. Bolton. "Papa is upstairs," said Hester through the window. But the old man would not come down to see his visitor, nor would he send any message. Then Caldigate declared his purpose of going at once to the mayor and demanding assistance from the police. He at any rate would return with the carriage as early as he could after

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his visit to the magistrates' office. He went to the mayor and inflicted much trouble on that excellent officer, who, however, at last, with the assistance of his clerk,—and of Robert Bolton, whom he saw on the sly,—came to the decision that his own authority would not suffice for the breaking open of a man's house in order that his married daughter should be taken by violence from his custody. "No doubt," he said; "no doubt," when Caldigate pleaded that Mr. Bolton's daughter was, at any rate for the present, his own wife; and that a man's right to have his wife is undoubted. Those words "no doubt" were said very often; but no other words were said. Then the clerk expressed an opinion that the proper course would be for Mr. Caldigate to go up to London and get an order from the Vice-Chancellor; which was, of course, tantamount to saying that his wife was to reman at Chesterton till after the trial,—unless she could effect her own escape.

But not on that account was he inclined to yield. He had felt from the first, as had she also, that she would make her way out of the house, or would not make it, as she might or might not have the courage to be persistent in demanding it. This, indeed, had been felt both by William and Robert Bolton when they had given their counsel. "She is a woman with a baby, and when in your house will be subject to your influences. She will be very angry at first, but will probably yield after a time to your instructions. She will at last give an unwilling assent to the course you propose. That is what may be expected. But if she should be firmer than we think, if there should be in her bosom a greater power of resistance than we expect, should she dash herself too violently against the cage,—then you must let her go." That was intended to be the

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gist of the advice given, though it perhaps was not so accurately expressed. It was in that way understood by the old man; but Mrs. Bolton would not so understand it. She had taken the matter in hand, and as she pressed her lips together she told herself that she intended to go through with it.

And so did Hester. But as this day went on, Hester became at times almost hysterical in her efforts to communicate with her husband through the window, holding up her baby and throwing back her head, and was almost in convulsions in her efforts to get at him. He on the other side thundered at the door with the knocker, till that instrument had been unscrewed from within. But still he could knock with his stick and shout with his voice; while the people outside the iron gates stood looking on in a crowd. In the course of the day Robert Bolton endeavoured to get an order from the magistrates for the removal of Caldigate by the police. But the mayor would not assent either to that. Old Mr. Bolton was the owner of the house, and if there was a nuisance to be complained of, it was he that must complain. The mayor during these days was much tried. The steady married people of the borough,—the shopkeepers and their wives, the doctors and lawyers and clergymen,—were in favour of Mr. and Mrs. Bolton. It was held to be fitting that a poor lady in Hester's unfortunate position should be consigned to the care of her parents till the matter had been settled. But the people generally sympathised with the young husband and young wife, and were loud in denouncing the illegality of the banker's proceedings. And it was already rumoured that among the Undergraduates Caldigate's side was favoured. It was generally known that Crinkett and the woman had asked

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for money before they had brought their accusation, and on that account sympathy ran with the Squire of Folking. The mayor, therefore, did not dare to give an order that Caldigate should be removed from off the premises at Puritan Grange, knowing that he was there in search of a wife who was only anxious to place herself in his custody.

But nothing was done all that day. About four in the afternoon, while Caldigate was still there, and at a moment in which poor Hester had been reduced by the continuance of her efforts to a state of hysterical prostration, the old man summoned his wife upstairs. She, with a motion to the cook, who still guarded the stairs, obeyed the order, and for a moment left her watch.

"You must let her go," said the old man, with tremulous anxiety, beating with his fingers on his knees as he spoke. "You must let her go."

"No; no!"

"It will kill her."

"If I let her go, I shall kill her soul," said the determined woman. "Is not her soul more than her body?"

"They will say we—murdered her."

"Who will say it? And what would that be but the breath of a man? Does not our Father who is in heaven know that I would die to do her a service, if the service accorded with His will? Does He not know that I am cruel to her here in order that she may be saved from eternal——" She was going to say, in the natural fevour of her speech, "from eternal cruelty to come," but she checked herself. To have admitted that such a judgment could be worse than just, worse

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even than merciful, would be blasphemy to her. "Oh, He knows! He knows! And if He knows, what matters what men say that I have done to her."

"I cannot have it go on like this," said he, still whispering.

"She will be wearied out, and then we will take her to her bed."

But Mr. Bolton succeeded in demanding that a telegram should be sent up to William requesting him to come down to the Grange as early as possible on the following morning. This was sent, and also a message to Robert Bolton in Cambridge, telling him that William had been summoned. During these two days he had not been seen at the Grange, though he knew much of what was being done there. Had he, however, been aware of all that his sister and stepmother were enduring, he would probably have appeared upon the scene. As it was, he had justified his absence by pleading to himself Mrs. Bolton's personal enmity, and the understanding which existed that he should not visit the house. Then, when it was dark, Caldigate with the carriage again returned to the town, where he slept as he had done on the previous night. Again their food was brought to the two women in the hall, and again each of them swallowed a cup of tea as they prepared themselves for the work of the night.

In the hall there was a gas-stove, which was kept burning, and gave a faint glimmer, so that each could see the outline of the other. Light beyond that there was none. In the weary long hours of nights such as these, nights passed on the seats of railway carriages, or rougher nights, such as some of us remember, on the outside of coaches, or sitting by the side of the sick,

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sleep will come early and will early go. The weariness of the past day will produce some forgetfulness for an hour or two, and then come the slow, cold, sad hours through which the dawn has to be expected. Between two and three these unfortunates were both awake, the poor baby having been but lately carried back from its mother to its cradle. Then suddenly Mrs. Bolton heard rather than saw her daughter slip down from her chair on to the ground and stretched herself along upon the hard floor. "Hester," she said; but Hester did not answer. "Hester, are you hurt?" When there was still no answer, the mother got up, with limbs so stiff that she could hardly use them, and stood over her child. "Hester, speak to me."

"I will never speak to you more," said the daughter.

"My child, why will you not go to your comfortable wholesome bed?"

"I will not go; I will die here."

"The door shall not be locked. You shall have the key with you. I will do nothing to hurt you if you will go to your bed."

"I will not go; leave me alone. You cannot love me, mamma, or you would not treat me like this."

"Love you! Oh, my child! If you knew! If you could understand! Why am I doing this? Is it not because I feel it to be my duty? Will you let me take you to your bed?"

"No, never. I, too, can do my duty,—my duty to my husband. It is to remain here till I can get to him, even though I should die." Then she turned her poor limbs on the hard floor, and the mother covered her with a cloak and placed a cushion beneath her head. Then, after standing a while over her child, she returned to her chair, and did not move or speak again till the

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old cook came with the first glimmer of the morning, to inquire how the night had been passed.

"I cannot allow this; I cannot allow this," said Mr. Bolton, when he shuffled down in his slippers. The old servant had been up to him and had warned him that such sufferings as these might have a tragic end,—too probably an end fatal to the infant. If the mother's strength should altogether fail her, would it not go badly with the baby? So the cook had argued, who had been stern enough herself, anxious enough to secure "Miss Hester" from the wickedness of John Caldigate. But she was now cowed and frightened, and had acknowledged to herself that if "Miss Hester" would not give way, then she must be allowed to go forth let the wickedness be what it might.

"There must be an end to this," said the old man.

"What end?" asked his wife. "Let her obey her parents."

"I will obey only my husband," said Hester.

"Of course there must be an end. Let her go to her bed, and, weary as I am, I will wait upon her as only a mother can wait upon her child. Have I not prayed for her through the watches of the night, that she might delivered from this calamity, that she might be comforted by Him in her sorrow? What have I done these two last weary days but pray to the Lord God that He might be merciful to her?"

"Let me go," said Hester.

"I will not let you go," said the mother, rising from her seat. "I too can suffer. I too can endure. I will not be conquered by my own child." There spoke the human being. That was the utterance natural to the woman. "In this struggle, hard as it is, I will not be beat by one who has been subject to my authority."

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In all those prayers,—and she had prayed,—there had been the prayer in her heart, if not in her words, that she might be saved from the humiliation of yielding.

Early in the day Caldigate was again in front of the house, and outside there was a close carriage with a pair of horses, standing at the gardener's little gate. And at the front gate, which was still chained, there was again the crowd. At about one both William and Robert Bolton came upon the scene, and were admitted by the gardener and cook through the kitchen-door into the house. They were close to Caldigate as they entered; but neither did they speak to him or he to them. At that moment Hester was standing with the baby at the window, and saw them. "Now I shall be allowed to go," she exclaimed. Mrs. Bolton was still seated with her back to the windows; but she had heard the steps on the gravel, and the opening of the kitchen-door; and she understood Hester's words, and was aware that her husband's sons were in the house.

They had agreed as to what should be done, and at once made their way up into the hall. "William, you will make them let me go. You will make them let me go," said Hester, rushing at once to the elder of the two, and holding out her baby as though for him to take. She was now in a state so excited, so nervous, so nearly hysterical, that she was hardly able to control herself. "You will not let them kill me, William,—me and my baby." He kissed her and said a kind word or two, and then, inquiring after his father, passed on upstairs. Then Mrs. Bolton followed him, leaving Robert in the hall with Hester. "I know that you have turned against me," said Hester.

"Indeed no. I have never turned against you. I

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have thought that you would be better here than at Folking for the present."

"That is being against me. A woman should be with her husband. You told them to do this. And they have nearly killed me,—me and my baby."

In the meantime William Bolton upstairs was very decided in his opinion that they must at once allow Caldigate to take her back to Folking. She had, as he said, proved herself to be too strong for them. The experiment had been tried and had failed. No doubt it would be better,—so he thought,—that she should remain for the present at the Grange; so much better that a certain show of force had been justified. But as things were going, no further force would be justified. She had proved her power, and must be allowed to go. Mrs. Bolton, however, would not even yet acknowledge that she was beaten. In a few more hours, she thought, Hester would allow herself to be taken to her bed, and then all might be well. But she could not stand against the combined force of her husband and his two sons; and so it was decided that the front door should be opened for the prisoner, and that the chains should be removed from the gate. "I should be afraid of the people," William Bolton said to his father.

It was not till this decision had been given that Mrs. Bolton felt that the struggle of the last three days had been too much for her. Now, at last, she threw herself upon her bed, weeping bitter tears, tears of a broken spirit, and there she lay prostrate with fatigue and misery. Nor would she go down to say a word of farewell. How could she say adieu to her daughter, leaving her house in such circumstances? "I will give her your love," said William Bolton.

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"Say nothing to her. She does not care for my love, nor for the love of her Father in heaven. She cares only for that adulterer."

The door was opened from within, and the chains were taken away from the gate. "Oh, John,—oh my husband," she exclaimed, as she leaped down the steps into his arms, "never let me go again; not for a day,—not for an hour." Then her boxes were brought down, and the nurse came with the child, whom the mother at once took and placed in his father's arms. And the carriage was brought in, and the luggage was placed on it, and the nurse and the baby were seated. "I will go up to poor mamma for one moment," she said, She did go to her mother's room, and throwing herself upon the wretched woman, wept over her and kissed her. But the mother, though in some sort she returned the caress, said not a word as her daughter left the room. And she went also to her father and asked his blessing. He muttered a word or two, blessing her, no doubt, with inarticulate words. He also had been thoroughly vanquished.

Then she got into the carriage, and was taken back to Folking lying in John Caldigate's arms.

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CHAPTER V

AGAIN AT FOLKING

THUS Hester prevailed, and was taken back to the house of the man who had married her. By this time very much had been said about the matter publicly. It had been impossible to keep the question,—whether John Caldigate's recent marriage had been true or fraudulent, —out of the newspapers; and now the attempt that had been made to keep them apart by force gave an additional interest to the subject. There was an opinion, very general among elderly educated people, that Hester ought to have allowed herself to be detained at the Grange. "We do not mean to lean heavily on the unfortunate young lady," said the "Isle-of-Ely-Church-Intelligencer"; "but we think that she would have better shown a becoming sense of her position had she submitted herself to her parents till the trial is over. Then the full sympathy of all classes would have been with her; and whether the law shall restore her to a beloved husband, or shall tell her that she has become the victim of a cruel seducer, she would have been supported by the approval and generous regard of all men." It was thus for the most part that the elderly and the wise spoke and thought about it. Of course, they pitied her; but they believed all evil of Caldigate, declaring that he too was bound by a feeling of duty to restore the unfortunate one to her father and mother until the matter should have been set at rest by the decision of a jury.

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But the people,—especially the people of Utterden and Netherden; and of Chesterton, and even of Cambridge,—were all on the side of Caldigate and Hester as a married couple. They liked the persistency with which he had claimed his wife, and applauded her to the echo for her love and firmness. Of course the scene at Puritan Grange had been much exaggerated. The two nights were prolonged to intervals varying from a week to a fortnight. During that time she was said always to have been at the window holding up her baby. And Mrs. Bolton was accused of cruelties which she certainly had not committed. Some details of the affair made their way into the metropolitan Press,—so that the expected trial became one of those causes célèbres by which the public is from time to time kept alive to the value and charm of newspapers.

During all this John Caldigate was specially careful not to seclude himself from public view, or to seem to be afraid of his fellow-creatures. He was constantly in Cambridge, generally riding thither on horseback, and on such occasions was always to be seen in Trumpington Street and Trinity Street. Between him and the Boltons there was, by tacit consent, no intercourse whatever after the attempted imprisonment. He never showed himself at Robert Bolton's office, nor when they met in the street did they speak to each other. Indeed at this time no gentleman or lady held any intercourse with Caldigate, except his father and Mr. Bromley the clergyman. The Babingtons were strongly of opinion that he should have surrendered the care of his wife, and Aunt Polly went so far as to write to him when she first heard of the affair at Chesterton, recommending him very strongly to leave her at the Grange. Then there was an angry correspondence, ended at last by a

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request from Aunt Polly that there might be no further intercourse between Babington and Folking till after the trial.

Caldigate, though he bore all this with an assured face, with but little outward sign of inward misgiving, suffered much,—much even from the estrangement of those with whom he had hitherto been familiar. To be "cut" by anyone was a pain to him. Not to be approved of, not to be courted, not to stand well in the eyes of those around him, was to him positive and immediate suffering. He was supported no doubt by the full confidence of his father, by the friendliness of the parson, and by the energetic assurances of partisans who were all on his side,—such as Mr. Ralph Holt, the farmer. While Caldigate had been in Cambridge waiting for his wife's escape, Holt and one or two others were maturing a plan for breaking into Puritan Grange, and restoring the wife to her husband. All this supported him. Without it he could hardly have carried himself as he did. But with all this, still he was very wretched. "It is that so many people should think me guilty," he said to Mr. Bromley.

She bore it better—though, of course, now that she was safe at Folking, she had but little to do as to outward bearing. In the first place, no doubt as to his truth ever touched her for a moment,—and not much doubt as to the result of the trial. It was to her an assured fact that John Caldigate was her husband, and she could not realise the idea that, such being the fact, a jury should say that he was not. But let all that be as it might, they two were one; and to adhere to him in every word, in every thought, in every little action, was to her the only line of conduct possible. She heard what Mr. Bromley said, she knew what her father-in-

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law thought, she was aware of the enthusiasm on her side of the folk at Folking. It seemed to her that this opposition to her happiness was but a continuation of that which her mother had always made to her marriage. The Boltons were all against her. It was a terrible sorrow to her. But she knew how to bear it bravely. In the tenderness of her husband, who at this time was very tender to her, she had her great consolation.

On the day of her return she had been very ill,—so ill that Caldigate and his father had been much frightened. During the journey home in the carriage, she had wept and laughed hysterically, now clutching her baby, and then embracing her husband. Before reaching Folking she had been so worn with fatigue that he had hardly been able to support her on the seat. But after rest for a day or two she had rallied completely. And she herself had taken pleasure and great pride in the fact that through it all her baby had never really been ill. "He is a little man," she said, boasting to the boy's father, "and knows how to put up with troubles. And when his mamma was so bad, he didn't peak and pine and cry, so as to break her heart. Did he, my own, own brave little man?" And she could boast of her own health too. "Thank God, I am strong, John. I can bear things which would break down other women. You shall never see me give way because I am a poor creature." Certainly she had a right to boast that she was not a poor creature.

Caldigate no doubt was subject to troubles of which she knew nothing. It was quite clear to him that Mr. Seely, his own lawyer, did in truth believe that there had been some form of marriage between him and Euphemia Smith. The attorney had never said so

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much,—had never accused him. It would probably have been opposed to all the proprieties in such a matter that any direct accusation should have been made against him by his own attorney. But he could understand from the man's manner that his mind was not free from a strong suspicion. Mr. Seely was eager enough as to the defence; but seemed to be eager as against opposing evidence rather than on the strength of evidence on his own side. He was not apparently desirous of making all the world know that such a marriage certainly never took place; but that, whether such a marriage had taken place or not, the jury ought not to trust the witnesses. He relied, not on the strength of his own client, but on the weakness of his client's adversaries. It might probably be capable of proof that Crinkett and Adamson and the woman had conspired together to get money from John Caldigate; and if so, then their evidence as to the marriage would be much weakened. And he showed himself not averse to any tricks of trade which might tend to get a verdict. Could it be proved that John Crinkett had been dishonest in his mining operations? Had Euphemia Smith allowed her name to be connected with that of any other man in Australia? What had been her antecedents? Was it not on the cards that Allan, the minister, had never undergone any ceremony of ordination? And, if not, might it not be shown that a marriage service performed by him would be no marriage service at all? Could not the jury be made to think,—or at least some of the jury,—that out there, in that rough lawless wilderness, marriage ceremonies were very little understood?

These were the wiles to which he seemed disposed to trust; whereas Caldigate was anxious that he should in-

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struct some eloquent indignant advocate to declare boldly that no English gentleman could have been guilty of conduct so base, so dastardly, and so cruel! "You see, Mr. Caldigate," the lawyer said on one occasion, "to make the best of it, our own hands are not quite clean. You did promise the other lady marriage."

"No doubt. No doubt I was a fool; and I paid for my folly. I bought her off. Having fallen into the common scrape,—having been pleased by her prettinesses and clevernesses and women's ways,—I did as so many other men have done. I got out of it as best I could without treachery and without dishonour. I bought her off. Had she refused to take my money, I should probably have married her,—and probably have blown my brains out afterwards. All that has to be acknowledged,—much to my shame. Most of us would have to blush if the worst of our actions were brought out before us in a court of law. But there was an end of it. Then they come over here and endeavour to enforce their demand for money by a threat."

"That envelope is so unfortunate," said the lawyer.

"Most unfortunate."

"Perhaps we shall get someone before the day comes who will tell the jury that any marriage up at Ahalala must have been a farce."

All this was unsatisfactory, and became so more and more as the weeks went by. The confidential clerk whom the Boltons had sent out when the first threat reached them early in November,—the threat conveyed in that letter from the woman which Caldigate had shown to Robert Bolton,—returned about the end of March. The two brothers, Robert and William, decided upon sending him to Mr. Seely, so that any information obtained might be at Caldigate's command, to

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be used, if of any use, in his defence. But there was in truth very little of it. The clerk had been up to Nobble and Ahalala, and had found no one there who knew enough of the matter to give evidence about it. The population of mining districts in Australia is peculiarly a shifting population, so that the most of those who had known Caldigate and his mode of life there were gone. The old woman who kept Henniker's Hotel at Nobble had certainly heard that they were married; but then she had added that many people there called themselves man and wife from convenience. A woman would often like a respectable name where there was no parson near at hand to entitle her to it. Then the parsons would be dilatory and troublesome and expensive, and a good many people were apt to think that they could do very well without ceremonies. She evidently would have done no good to either side as a witness. This clerk had found Ahalala almost deserted,—occupied chiefly by a few Chinese, who were contented to search for the specks of gold which more ambitious miners had allowed to slip through their fingers. The woman had certainly called herself Mrs. Caldigate, and had been called so by many. But she had afterwards been called Mrs. Crinkett, when she and Crinkett had combined their means with the view of buying the Polyeuka mine. She was described as an enterprising, greedy woman, upon whom the love of gold had had almost more than its customary effect. And she had for a while been noted and courted for her success, having been the only female miner who was supposed to have realised money in these parts. She had been known to the banks at Nobble, also even at Sydney; and had been supposed at one time to have been worth twenty or thirty thousand pounds. Then she had joined herself

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with Crinkett, and all their money had been supposed to vanish in the Polyeuka mine. No doubt there had been enough in that to create animosity of the most bitter kind against Caldigate. He in his search for gold had been uniformly successful,—was spoken of among the Nobble miners as the one man who in gold-digging had never had a reverse. He had gone away just before the bad time came on Polyeuka; and then had succeeded, after he had gone, in extracting from these late unfortunate partners of his every farthing that he had left them! There was ample cause for animosity.

Allan, the minister, who certainly had been at Ahalala, was as certainly dead. He had gone out from Scotland as a Presbyterian clergyman, and no doubt had ever been felt as to his being that which he called himself;—and a letter from him was produced, which had undoubtedly been written by himself. Robert Bolton had procured a photograph of the note which the woman produced as having been written by Allan to Caldigate. The handwriting did not appear to him to be the same, but an expert had given an opinion that they both might have been written by the same person. Of Dick Shand no tidings had been found. It was believed that he had gone from Queensland to some of the Islands,—probably to the Fijis; but he had sunk so low among men as to have left no trace behind him. In Australia no one cares to know whence a shepherd has come or whither he goes. A miner belongs to a higher class, and is more considered. The result of all which was, in the opinion of the Boltons, adverse to John Caldigate. And in discussing this with his client Mr. Seely acknowledged that nothing had as yet come to light sufficient to shake the direct testimony of the woman, corroborated as it was by three persons, all of

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whom would swear that they had been present at the marriage.

"No doubt they endeavoured to get money from you," said Mr. Seely; "and I may be well assured in my own mind that money was their sole object. But then it cannot be denied that their application to you for money had a sound basis,—one which, though you might fairly refuse to allow it, takes away from the application all idea of criminality. Crinkett has never asked for money as a bribe to hold his tongue. In a matter of trade between them and you, you were very successful; they were very unfortunate. A man asking for restitution in such circumstances will hardly be regarded as dishonest."

It was to no purpose that Caldigate declared that he would willingly have remitted a portion of the money had he known the true circumstances. He had not done so, and now the accusation was made. The jury, feeling that the application had been justifiable, would probably keep the two things distinct. That was Mr. Seely's view; and thus, in these days, Caldigate gradually came to hate Mr. Seely. There was no comfort to be had from Mr. Seely.

Mr. Bromley was much more comfortable, though, unfortunately, in such a matter less to be trusted.

"As to the minister's handwriting," he said, "that will go for nothing. Even if he had written the note——"

"Which he didn't," said Caldigate.

"Exactly. But should it be believed to have been his, it would prove nothing. And as to the envelope, I cannot think that any jury would disturb the happiness of a family on such evidence as that. It all depends on the credibility of the people who swear that they

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were present; and I can only say that were I one of the jury, and were the case brought before me as I see it now, I certainly should not believe them. There is here one letter to you, declaring that if you will comply with her demands, she will not annoy you, and declaring also her purpose of marrying someone else. How can any juryman believe her after that?"

"Mr. Seely says that twelve men will not be less likely to think me a bigamist because she has expressed her readiness to commit bigamy; that, if alone, she would not have a leg to stand upon, but that she is amply corroborated; whereas I have not been able to find a single witness to support me. It seems to me that in this way any man might be made the victim of a conspiracy."

Then Mr. Bromley said that all that would be too patent to a jury to have any doubt upon the matter. But John Caldigate himself, though he took great comfort in the society of the clergyman, did in truth rely rather on the opinion of the lawyer.

The old squire never doubted his son for a moment, and in his intercourse with Hester showed her all the tenderness and trust of a loving parent. But he, too, manifestly feared the verdict of a jury. According to him, things in the world around him generally were very bad. What was to be expected from an ordinary jury such as Cambridgeshire would supply but prejudice, thick-headed stupidity, or at the best a strict obedience to the dictum of a judge. "It is a case," he said, "in which no jury about here will have sense enough to understand and weigh the facts. There will be on one side the evidence of four people, all swearing the same thing. It may be that one or more of them will break down under cross-examination, and that all

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will then be straight. But if not, the twelve men in a box will believe them because they are four, not understanding that in such a case four may conspire as easily as two or three. There will be the Judge, no doubt; but English judges are always favourable to convictions. The Judge begins with the idea that the man before him would hardly have been brought there had he not been guilty."

In all this, and very much more that he said both to Mr. Bromley and his son, he was expressing his contempt for the world around him rather than any opinion of his own on this particular matter. "I often think," said he, "that we have to bear more from the stupidity than from the wickedness of the world."

It should be mentioned that about a week after Hester's escape from Chesterton there came to her a letter from her mother.

"DEAREST HESTER,—You do not think that I do not love you because I tried to protect you from what I believe to be sin and evil and temptation? You do not think that I am less your mother because I caused you suffering? If your eye offend you, pluck it out. Was I not plucking out my own eye when I caused pain to you? You ought to come back to me and your father. You ought to do so even now. But whether you come back or not, will you not remember that I am the mother who bore you, and have always loved you? And when further distress shall come upon you, will you not return to me?—Your unhappy but most loving Mother,

"MARY BOLTON."

In answer to this Hester, in a long letter, acknowledged her mother's love, and said that the memory of

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those two days at Chesterton should lessen neither her affection nor her filial duty; but, she went on to say that, in whatever distress might come upon her, she should turn to her husband for comfort and support, whether he should be with her, whether he should be away from her. "But," she added, concluding her letter, "beyond my husband and my child, you and papa will always be the dearest to me."

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CHAPTER VI

BOLLUM

THERE was not much to enliven the house at Folking during these days. Caldigate would pass much of his time walking about the place, applying his mind as well as he could to the farm, and holding up his head among the tenants, with whom he was very popular. He had begun his reign over them with hands not only full, but free. He had drained, and roofed, and put up gates, and repaired roads, and shown himself to be an active man, anxious to do good. And now in his trouble they were very true to him. But their sympathy could not ease the burden at heart. Though by his words and deeds among them he seemed to occupy himself fully, there was a certain amount of pretence in every effort that he made. He was always affecting a courage in which he felt himself to be deficient. Every smile was false. Every brave word spoken was an attempt at deceit. When alone in his walks,—and he was mostly alone,—his mind would fix itself on his great trouble, and on the crushing sorrow which might only too probably fall upon that loved one whom he had called his wife. Oh, with what regret now did he think of the good advice which the captain had given him on board the Goldfinder, and of the sententious, timid wisdom of Mrs. Callander! Had she,—his Hester, ever uttered to him one word of reproach,—had she ever shuddered in his sight when he had acknowledged that the now

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odious woman had in that distant land been in his own hearing called by his own name,—it would have been almost better. Her absolute faith added a sting to his sufferings.

Then, as he walked alone about the estate, he would endeavour to think whether there might not yet be some mode of escape,—whether something might not be done to prevent his having to stand in the dock and abide the uncertain verdict of a jury. With Mr. Seely he was discontented. Mr. Seely seemed to be opposed to any great effort,—would simply trust to the chance of snatching little advantages in the Court. He had money at command. If fifty thousand pounds, if double that sum,—would have freed him from this trouble, he thought that he could have raised it, and was sure that he would willingly pay it. Twenty thousand pounds two months since, when Crinkett appeared at the christening, would have sent these people away. The same sum, no doubt, would send them away now. But then the arrangement might have been possible. But now,—how was it now? Could it still be done? Then the whole thing might have been hidden, buried in darkness. Now it was already in the mouths of all men. But still if these witnesses were made to disappear,—if this woman herself by whom the charge was made would take herself away—then the trial must be abandoned. There would be a whispering of evil,—or, too probably, the saying of evil without whispering. A terrible injury would have been inflicted upon her and his boy;—but the injury would be less than that which he now feared.

And there was present to him through all this a feeling that the money ought to be paid independently of the accusation brought against him. Had he known at first all that he knew now,—how he had taken their all

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from these people, and how they had failed absolutely in the last great venture they had made,—he would certainly have shared their loss with them. He would have done all that Crinkett had suggested to him when he and Crinkett were walking along the dike. Crinkett had said that on receiving twenty thousand pounds he would have gone back to Australia, and would have taken a wife with him! That offer had been quite intelligible, and if carried out would have put an end to all trouble. But he had mismanaged that interview. He had been too proud,—too desirous not to seem to buy off a threatening enemy. Now, as the trouble pressed itself more closely upon him,—upon him and his Hester,—he would so willingly buy off his enemy if it were possible! "They ought to have the money," he said to himself; "if only I could contrive that it should be paid to them."

One day as he was entering the house by a side door, Darvell the gardener told him that there was a gentleman waiting to see him. The gentleman was very anxious to see him, and had begged to be allowed to sit down. Darvell, when asked whether the gentleman was a gentleman, expressed an affirmative opinion. He had been driven over from Cambridge in a hired gig, which was now standing in the yard, and was dressed, as Darvell expressed it, "quite accordingly and genteel." So Caldigate passed into the house and found the man seated in the dining-room.

"Perhaps you will step into my study?" said Caldigate. Thus the two men were seated together in the little room which Caldigate used for his own purposes.

Caldigate, as he looked at the man, distrusted his gardener's judgment. The coat and hat and gloves, even the whiskers and head of hair, might have be-

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longed to a gentleman; but not, as he thought, the mouth or the eyes or the hands. And when the man began to speak there was a mixture of assurance and intended complaisance, an affected familiarity and an attempt at ease, which made the master of the house quite sure that his guest was not all that Darvell had represented. The man soon told his story. His name was Bollum, Richard Bollum, and he had connections with Australia;—was largely concerned in Australian gold-mines. When Caldigate heard this, he looked round involuntarily to see whether the door was closed. "We're tiled, of course," said Bollum. Caldigate with a frown nodded his head, and Bollum went on. He hadn't come there, he said, to speak of some recent troubles of which he had heard. He wasn't the man to shove his nose into other people's matters. It was nothing to him who was married to whom. Caldigate shivered, but sat and listened in silence. But Mr. Bollum had had dealings,—many dealings, with Timothy Crinkett. Indeed he was ready to say that Timothy Crinkett was his uncle. He was not particularly proud of his uncle, but nevertheless Timothy Crinkett was his uncle. Didn't Mr. Caldigate think that something ought to be done for Timothy Crinkett?

"Yes, I do," said Caldigate, finding himself compelled to say something at the moment, and feeling that he could say so much with positive truth.

Then Bollum continued his story, showing that he knew all the circumstances of Polyeuka. "It was hard on them, wasn't it, Mr. Caldigate?"

"I think it was."

"Every rap they had among them, Mr. Caldigate! You left them as bare as the palm of my hand!"

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"It was not my doing. I simply made him an offer, which everyone at the time believed to be liberal."

"Just so. We grants all that. But still you got all their money;—old pals of yours too, as they say out there."

"It is a matter of most intense regret to me. As soon as I knew the circumstances, Mr. Bollum, I should have been most happy to have divided the loss with them——"

"That's it,—that's it. That's what'd be right between man and man," said Mr. Bollum, interrupting him.

"Had no other subject been introduced."

"I know nothing about other subjects. I haven't come here to meddle with other subjects. I'm, as it were, a partner of Crinkett's. Anyway, I am acting as his agent. I'm quite above board, Mr. Caldigate, and in what I say I mean to stick to my own business and not go beyond it. Twenty thousand pounds is what we ask,—so that we and you may share the loss. You agree to that?"

"I should have agreed to it two months since," said Caldigate, fearing that he might be caught in a trap,—anxious to do nothing mean, unfair, or contrary to the law,—craving in his heart after the bold, upright conduct of a thoroughly honourable English gentleman, and yet desirous also to use, if it might be used, the instrumentality of this man.

"And why not now? You see," said Bollum, becoming a little more confidential, "how difficult it is for me to speak. Things ain't altered. You've got the money. They've lost the money. There isn't any ill-will, Mr. Caldigate. As for Crinkett, he's a rough

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diamond, of course. What am I to say about the lady?"

"I don't see that you need say anything."

"That's just it. Of course she's one of them. That's all. If there is to be money, she'll have her share. He's an old fool, and perhaps they'll make a match of it." As he said this he winked. "At any rate they'll be off to Australia together. And what I propose is this, Mr. Caldigate——" Then he paused.

"What do you propose?"

"Make the money payable in bills to their joint order at Sydney. They don't want to be wasting any more time here. They'll start at once. This is the 12th April, isn't it? Tuesday the 12th?" Caldigate assented. "The old Goldfinder leaves Plymouth this day week." From this he was sure that Bollum had heard all the story from Euphemia Smith herself, or he would not have talked of the "old" Goldfinder. "Let them have the hills handed to them on board, and they'll go. Let me have the duplicates here. You can remit the money by July to your agents,—to take up the bills when due. Just let me be with you when the order is given to your banker in London, and everything will be done. It's as easy as a kiss."

Caldigate sat silent, turning it over in his own mind, trying to determine what would be best. Here was another opportunity. But it was one as to which he must come to a decision on the spur of the moment. He must deal with the man now or never. The twenty thousand pounds were nothing. Had there been no question about his wife, he would have paid the money, moved by that argument as to his "old pals,"—by the conviction that the result of his dealing with them had in truth been to leave them "as bare as the palm of

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his hand." They were welcome to the money; and if by giving the money he could save his Hester, how great a thing it would be! Was it not his duty to make the attempt? And yet there was in his bosom a strong aversion to have any secret dealing with such a man as this,—to have any secret dealing in such a matter. To buy off witnesses in order that his wife's name and his boy's legitimacy might be half,—only half,—established! For even though these people should be made absolutely to vanish, though the sea should swallow them, all that had been said would be known, and too probably believed for ever!

And then, too, he was afraid. If he did this thing alone, without counsel, would he not be putting himself into the hands of these wretches? Might he not be almost sure that when they had gotten his money they would turn upon him and demand more? Would not the payment of the money be evidence against him to any jury? Would it be possible to make judge or jury believe, to make even a friend believe, that in such an emergency he had paid away so large a sum of money because he had felt himself bound to do so by his conscience?

"Well, squire," said Bollum, "I think you see your way through it; don't you?"

"I don't regard the money in the least. They would be welcome to the money."

"That's a great point, anyway."

"But——"

"Ay; but! You're afraid they wouldn't go. You come down to Plymouth, and don't put the bills into their hands or mine till the vessel is under weigh, with them aboard. Then you and I will step into the boat. and be back ashore. When they know the money's been

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deposited at a bank in London, they'll trust you as far as that. The Goldfinder won't put back again when she's once off. Won't that make it square?"

"I was thinking of something else."

"Well, yes; there's that trial a-coming on; isn't there?"

"These people have conspired together to tell the basest lie."

"I know nothing about that, Mr. Caldigate. I haven't got so much as an opinion. People tell me that all the things look very strong on their side."

"Liars sometimes are successful."

"You can be quit of them,—and pay no more than what you say you kind of owes. I should have thought Crinkett might have asked forty thousand; but Crinkett, though he's rough,—I do own he's rough,—but he's honest after a fashion. Crinkett wants to rob no man; but he feels it hard when he's got the better of. Lies, or no lies, can you do better?"

"I should like to see my lawyer first," said Caldigate, almost panting in his anxiety.

"What lawyer? I hate lawyers."

"Mr. Seely. My case is in his hands, and I should have to tell him."

"Tell him when you come back from Plymouth, and hold your peace till that's done. No good can come of lawyers in such a matter as this. You might as well tell the town-crier. Why should he want to put bread out of his own mouth? And if there is a chance of hard words being said, why should he hear them? He'll work for his money, no doubt; but what odds is it to him whether your lady is to be called Mrs. Caldigate or Miss Bolton? He won't have to go to prison. His boy won't be!—you know what." This was ter-

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rible, but yet it was all so true! "I'll tell you what it is, squire. We can't make it lighter by talking about it all round. I used to do a bit of hunting once; and I never knew any good come of asking what there was the other side of the fence. You've got to have it, or you've got to leave it alone. That's just where you are. Of course it isn't nice."

"I don't mind the money."

"Just so. But it isn't nice for a swell like you to have to hand it over to such a one as Crinkett just as the ship's starting, and then to bolt ashore along with me. The odds are, it is all talked about. Let's own all that. But then it's not nice to have to hear a woman swear that she's your wife, when you've got another,—specially when she's got three men as can swear the same. It ain't nice for you to have me sitting here. I'm well aware of that. There's the choice of evils. You know what that means. I'm a-putting it about as fair as a man can put anything. It's a pity you didn't stump up the money before. But it's not altogether quite too late yet."

"I'll give you an answer to-morrow, Mr. Bollum."

"I must be in town to-night."

"I will be with you in London to-morrow if you will give me an address. All that you have said is true; but I cannot do this thing without thinking of it."

"You'll come alone?"

"Yes,—alone."

"As a gentleman?"

"On my word as a gentleman I will come alone."

Then Bollum gave him an address,—not the place at which he resided, but a certain coffee-house in the City, at which he was accustomed to make appointments. "And don't you see any lawyer," said Bollum, shaking

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his finger. "You can't do any good that way. It stands to reason that no lawyer would let you pay twenty thousand pounds to get out of any scrape. He and you have different legs to stand upon." Then Mr. Bollum went away, and was driven back in his gig to the Cambridge Hotel.

As soon as the front door was closed Hester hurried down to her husband, whom she found still in the hall. He took her into his own room, and told her everything that had passed,—everything, as accurately as he could. "And remember," he said, "though I do not owe them money, that I feel bound by my conscience to refund them so much. I should do it, now I know the circumstances, if no charge had been brought against me."

"They have perjured themselves, and have been so wicked."

"Yes, they have been very wicked."

"Let them come and speak the truth, and then let them have the money."

"They will not do that, Hester."

"Prove them to be liars, and then give it to them."

"My own girl, I am thinking of you."

"And I of you. Shall it be said of you that you bought off those who had dared to say that your wife was not your wife? I would not do that. What if the people in the court should believe what they say?"

"It would be bad for you, then, dearest?"

"But I should still be your wife. And baby would still be your own, own honest boy. I am sometimes unhappy, but I am never afraid. Let the devil do his worst, but never speak him fair. I would scorn them till it is all over. Then, if money be due to them, let them have it." As she said this, she had drawn herself a little part from him,—a little away from the arm

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which had been round her waist, and was looking him full in the face. Never before, even during the soft happiness of their bridal tour, had she seemed to him to be so handsome.

But her faith, her courage, and her beauty did not alter the circumstances of the case. Because she trusted him, he was not the less afraid of the jury who would have to decide, or of the judge, who, with stern eyes, would probably find himself compelled to tell the jury that the evidence against the prisoner was overwhelming. In choosing what might be best to be done on her account, he could not allow himself to be guided by her spirit. The possibility that the whole gang of them might be made to vanish was present to his mind. Nor could he satisfy himself that in doing as had been proposed to him he would be speaking the devil fair. He would be paying money which he ought to pay, and would perhaps be securing his wife's happiness.

He had promised, at any rate, that he would see the man in London on the morrow, and that he would see him alone. But he had not promised not to speak on the subject to his attorney. Therefore, after much thought, he wrote to Mr. Seely to make an appointment for the next morning, and then told his wife that he would have to go to London on the following day.

"Not to buy those men off?" she said.

"Whatever is done will be done by the advice of my lawyer," he said, peevishly. "You may be sure that I am anxious enough to do the best. When one has to trust to a lawyer, one is bound to trust to him." This seemed to be so true that Hester could say nothing against it.

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CHAPTER VII

RESTITUTION

He had still the whole night to think about it,—and throughout the whole night he was thinking about it. He had fixed a late hour in the afternoon for his appointment in London, so that he might have an hour or two in Cambridge before he started by the mid-day train. It was during his drive into the town that he at last made up his mind that he would not satisfy himself with discussing the matter with Mr. Seely, but that he would endeavour to explain it all to Robert Bolton. No doubt Robert Bolton was now his enemy, as were all the Boltons. But the brother could not but be anxious for his sister's name and his sister's happiness. If a way out of all this misery could be seen, it would be a way out of misery for the Boltons as well as for the Caldigates. If only he could make the attorney believe that Hester was in truth his wife, still, even yet, there might be assistance on that side. But he went to Mr. Seely first, the hour of his appointment requiring that it should be so.

But Mr. Seely was altogether opposed to any arrangement with Mr. Bollum. "No good was ever done," he said, "by buying off witnesses. The thing itself is disreputable, and would to a certainty be known to everyone."

"I should not buy them off. I regard the money

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as their own. I will give Crinkett the money and let him go or stay as he pleases. When giving him the money, I will tell him that he may do as he pleases."

"You would only throw your money away. You would do much worse than throw it away. Their absence would not prevent the trial. The Boltons will take care of that."

"They cannot want to injure their own side, Mr. Seely."

"They want to punish you, and to take her away. They will take care that the trial shall go on. And when it was proved, as it would be proved, that you had given these people a large sum of money, and had so secured their absence, do you think that the jury would refuse to believe their sworn depositions, and whatever other evidence would remain? The fact of your having paid them money would secure a verdict against you. The thing would, in my mind, be so disreputable that I should have to throw up the case. I could not defend you."

It was clear to him that Bollum had understood his own side of the question in deprecating any reference to an attorney. The money should have been paid and the four witnesses sent away without a word to anyone,—if any attempt in that direction were made at all. Nevertheless he went to Robert Bolton's office and succeeded in obtaining an interview with his wife's brother. But here, as with the other attorney, he failed to make the man understand the state of his own mind. He had failed in the same way even with his wife. If it were fit that the money should be paid, it could not be right that he should retain it because the people to whom it was due had told lies about him. And if this

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could be explained to the jury, surely the jury would not give a verdict against him on insufficient evidence, simply because he had done his duty in paying the money!

Robert Bolton listened to him with patience and without any quick expression of hot anger; though before the interview was over he had used some very cruel words. "We should think ourselves bound to prevent their going, if possible."

"Of course; I have no idea of going down to Plymouth as the man proposed, or of taking any steps to secure their absence."

"Your money is your own, and you can do what you like with it. It certainly is not for me to advise you. If you tell me that you are going to pay it, I can only say that I shall look very sharp after them."

"Why should you want to ruin your sister?"

"You have ruined her. That is our idea. We desire now to rescue her as far as we can from further evil. You have opposed us in every endeavour that we have made. When in the performance of a manifest duty we endeavoured to separate you till after the trial, you succeeded in thwarting us by your influence."

"I left it to her."

"Had you been true and honest and upright, you would have known that as long as there was a doubt she ought to have been away from you."

"I should have sent her away?"

"Certainly."

"So as to create a doubt in her mind, so as to disturb her peace, so as to make her think that I, having been found out, was willing to be rid of her? It would have killed her."

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"Better so than this."

"And yet I am as truly her husband as you are the husband of your wife. If you would only teach yourself to think that possible, then you would feel differently."

"Not as to a temporary separation."

"If you believed me, you would," said Caldigate.

"But I do not believe you. In a matter like this, as you will come to me, I must be plain. I do not believe you. I think that you have betrayed and seduced my sister. Looking at all the evidence and at your own confession, I can come to no other conclusion. I have discussed the matter with my brother, who is a clear, cool-headed, most judicious man, and he is of the same opinion. In our own private court we have brought you in guilty,—guilty of an offence against us which necessarily makes us as bitter against you as one man can be against another. You have destroyed our sister, and now you come here and ask me my advice as to buying off witnesses!"

"It is all untrue. As there is a God above me I am her loyal, loving husband. I will buy off no witness."

"If I were you I would make no such attempt. It will do no good. I do not think that you have a chance of being acquitted,—not a chance; and then how much worse it will be for Hester when she finds herself still in your house!"

"She will remain there."

"Even she will feel that to be impossible. Your influence will then probably be removed, and I presume that for a time you will have no home. But we need not discuss that. As you are here, I should not do my duty were I not to assure you that as far as we

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are concerned,—Hester's family,—nothing shall be spared either in trouble or money to insure the conviction and punishment of the man whom we believe to have brought upon us so terrible a disgrace."

Caldigate, when he got out into the street, felt that he was driven almost to despair. At first he declared to himself, most untruly, that there was no one to believe him,—no, not one. Then he remembered how faithful was his wife; and as he did so, in his misery, he told himself that it might have been better for her had she been less faithful. Looking at it all as he now looked at it, after hearing the words of that hard man, he almost thought that it would have been so. Everybody told him that he would be condemned; and if so, what would be the fate of that poor young mother and her child? It was very well for her to declare, with her arms around his neck, that even should he be dragged away to prison, she would still be his true wife, and that she would wait,—in sorrow indeed and mourning, but still with patience,—till the cruel jailers and the harsh laws had restored him to her. If the law declared him a bigamist, she could not then be his wife. The law must decide,—whether rightly or wrongly, still must decide. And then how could they live together? An evil must be endured, let it be ever so unendurable. But against fresh evils a man may guard. Was it not his duty, his manifest, his chief duty, to save her, as far as she could be saved, from further suffering and increased disgrace? Perhaps, after all, Robert Bolton was right when he told him that he ought to have allowed Hester to remain at Chesterton.

Whatever he might do when he got to London, he felt it to be his duty to go up and keep his appoint-

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ment with Bollum. And he brought with him from home securities and certificates for stock by which he knew that he could raise the sum named at a moment's warning, should he at last decide upon paying the money. When he got into the train, and when he got out of the train, he was still in doubt. Those to whom he had gone for advice had been so hard to him, that he felt himself compelled to put on one side all that they had said. Bollum had suggested, in his graphic manner, that a lawyer and his client stood upon different legs. Caldigate acknowledged to himself that Bollum was right. His own lawyer had been almost as hard to him as his brother-in-law, who was his declared enemy. But what should he do? As to precautions to be taken in reference to the departure of the gang, all that was quite out of the question. They should go to Australia or stay behind, as they pleased. There should be no understanding that they were to go—or even that they were to hold their tongues because the money was paid to them. It should be fully explained to them that the two things were distinct. Then as he was taken to the inn at which he intended to sleep that night, he made up his mind in the cab that he would pay the money to Crinkett.

He got to London just in time to reach the bank before it was closed, and there made his arrangements. He deposited his documents and securities, and was assured that the necessary sum should be placed to his credit on the following day. Then he walked across a street or two in the City to the place indicated by Bollum for the appointment. It was at the Jericho Coffee House, in Levant Court,—a silent, secluded spot, lying between Lombard Street and Cornhill. Here he found himself ten minutes before

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the time, and, asking for a cup of coffee, sat down at a table fixed to the ground in a little separate box. The order was given to a young woman at a bar in the room. Then an ancient waiter hobbled up to him and explained that coffee was not quite ready. In truth, coffee was not often asked for at the Jericho Coffee House. The house, said the waiter, was celebrated for its sherry. Would he take half a pint of sherry? So he ordered the sherry, which was afterwards drunk by Bollum.

Bollum came, punctual to the moment, and seated himself at the table with good-humoured alacrity. "Well, Mr. Caldigate, how is it to be? I think you must have seen that what I have proposed will be for the best."

"I will tell you what I mean to do, Mr. Bollum," said Caldigate, very gravely. "It cannot be said that I owe Mr. Crinkett a shilling."

"Certainly not. But it comes very near owing, doesn't it?"

"So near that I mean to pay it."

"That's right."

"So near that I don't like to feel that I have got his money in my pocket. As far as money goes, I have been a fortunate man."

"Wonderful!" said Bollum, enthusiastically.

"And as I was once in partnership with your uncle, I do not like to think that I enriched myself by a bargain which impoverished him."

"It ain't nice, is it,—that you should have it all, and he nothing?"

"Feeling that very strongly," continued Caldigate, merely shaking his head in token of displeasure at Bollum's interruption, "I have determined to repay

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Mr. Crinkett an amount that seems to me to be fair. He shall have back twenty thousand pounds."

"He's a lucky fellow, and he'll be off like a shot;—like a shot."

"He and others have conspired to rob me of all my happiness, thinking that they might so most probably get this money from me. They have invented a wicked lie,—a wicked damnable lie,—a damnable lie! They are miscreants,—foul miscreants!"

"Come, come, Mr. Caldigate."

"Foul miscreants! But they shall have their money, and you shall hear me tell them when I give it to them,—and they must both be here to take it from my hands,—that I do not at all require their absence. There is to be no bargain between us. They are free to remain and swear their false oaths against me. Whether they go or whether they stay will be no affair of mine."

"They'll go, of course, Mr. Caldigate."

"Not at my instance. I will take care that that shall be known. They must both come; and into their joint hands will I give the cheque, and they must come prepared with a receipt declaring that they accept the money as restitution of the loss incurred by them in purchasing the Polyeuka mine from me. Do you understand? And I shall bring a witness with me to see them take the money." Bollum, who was considerably depressed by his companion's manner, said that he did understand.

"I suppose I can have a private room here, at noon to-morrow?" asked Caldigate, turning to the woman at the bar.

When that was settled he assured Bollum that a cheque for the amount should be placed in the joint

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hands of Timothy Crinkett and Euphemia Smith if he, and they with him, would be there at noon on the following morning. Bollum in vain attempted to manage the payment without the personal interview, but at last agreed that the man and the woman should be forthcoming.

That night Caldigate dined at his Club, one of the University Clubs, at which he had been elected just at the time of his marriage. He had seldom been there, but now walked into the dinner-room, resolving that he would not be ashamed to show himself. He fancied that everybody looked at him, and probably there were some present who knew that he was about to stand his trial for bigamy. But he got his dinner, and smoked his cigar; and before the evening was over he had met an old College friend. He was in want of a friend, and explained his wants. He told something of his immediate story, and then asked the man to be present at the scene on the morrow.

"I must have a witness, Gray," said he, "and you will do me a kindness if you will come." Then Mr. Gray promised to be present on the occasion.

On the following morning he met Gray at the Club, having the cheque ready in his pocket, and together they proceeded to Levant Court. Again he was a little before his time, and the two sat together in the gloomy little room upstairs. Bollum was the first to come, and when he saw the stranger, was silent,—thinking whether it might not be best to escape and warn Crinkett and the woman that all might not be safe. But the stranger did not look like a detective; and, as he told himself, why should there be danger? So he waited, and in a few minutes Crinkett entered the room, with the woman veiled.

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"Well, Caldigate," said Crinkett; "how is it with you?"

"If you please, Mrs. Smith," said Caldigate, "I must ask you to remove your veil,—so that I may be sure that it is you."

She removed her veil very slowly, and then stood looking him in the face,—not full in the face, for she could not quite raise her eyes to meet his. And though she made an effort to brazen it out, she could not quite succeed. She attempted to raise her head, and carry herself with pride; but every now and again there was a slight quiver,—slight, but still visible. The effort, too, was visible. But there she stood, looking at him, and to be looked at,—but without a word. During the whole interview she never once opened her lips.

She had lost all her comeliness. It was now nearly seven years since they two had been on the Goldfinder together, and then he had found her very attractive. There was no attraction now. She was much aged; and her face was coarse, as though she had taken to drinking. But there was still about her something of that look of intellect which had captivated him more, perhaps, than her beauty. Since those days she had become a slave to gold,—and such slavery is hardly compatible with good looks in a woman. There she stood,—ready to listen to him, ready to take his money, but determined not to utter a word.

Then he took the cheque out of his pocket, and holding it in his hand, spoke to them as follows: "I have explained to Mr. Bollum, and have explained to my friend here, Mr. Gray, the reasons which induce me to pay to you, Timothy Crinkett, and to you, Euphemia Smith, the large sum of twenty thousand

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pounds. The nature of our transactions has been such that I feel bound in honour to repay so much of the price you paid for the Polyueka mine."

"All right, Caldigate; all right," said Crinkett.

"And I have explained also to both of them that this payment has nothing whatever to do with the base, false, and most wicked charge which you are bringing against me. It is not because that woman, by a vile perjury, claims me as her husband, and because I wish to buy her silence or his, that I make this restitution. I restore the money of my own free will, without any base bargain. You can go on with your perjury or abstain from it, as you may think best."

"We understand, squire," said Crinkett, affecting to laugh. "You hand over the money,—that's all." Then the woman looked round at her companion, and a frown came across her face; but she said nothing, turning her face again upon Caldigate, and endeavouring to keep her eyes stedfastly fixed upon him.

"Have you brought a receipt signed by both of you?" Then Bollum handed him a receipt signed "Timothy Crinkett, for self and partners." But Caldigate demanded that the woman also should sign it.

"There is a difficulty about the name, you see," said Bollum. There was a difficulty about the name, certainly. It would not be fair, he thought, that he should force her to the use of a name she disowned, and he did not wish to be hindered from what he was doing by her persistency in calling herself by his own name.

"So be it," said he. "There is the cheque. Mr. Gray will see that I put it into both their hands." This he did, each of them reaching out a hand to take it. "And now you can go where you please and act as you please. You have combined to rob me of all that

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I value most by the basest of lies; but not on that account have I abstained from doing what I believe to be an act of justice." Then he left the room, and paying for the use of it to the woman at the bar, walked off with his friend Gray, leaving Crinkett, Bollum, and the woman still within the house.

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CHAPTER VIII

WAITING FOR THE TRIAL

As he returned to Cambridge Caldigate was not altogether contented with himself. He tried to persuade himself, in reference to the money which he had refunded, that in what he had done he had not at all been actuated by the charge made against him. Had there been no such accusation he would have felt himself bound to share the loss with these people as soon as he had learned the real circumstances. The money had been a burden to him. For the satisfaction of his own honour, of his own feelings, it had become necessary that the money should be refunded. And the need of doing so was not lessened by the fact that a base conspiracy had been made by a gang of villains who had thought that the money might thus be most readily extracted from him. That was his argument with himself, and his defence for what he had done. But nevertheless he was aware that he had been driven to do it now,—to pay the money at this special moment,—by an undercurrent of hope that these enemies would think it best for themselves to go as soon as they had his money in their hands. He wished to be honest, he wished to be honourable, he wished that all that he did could be what the world calls "above board"; but still it was so essential for him and for his wife that they should go! He had been very steady in

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assuring these wretched ones that they might go or stay, as they pleased. He had been careful that there should be a credible witness of his assurance. He might succeed in making others believe that he had not attempted to purchase their absence; but he could not make himself believe it.

Even though a jury should not convict him, there was so much in his Australian life which would not bear the searching light of a cross-examination! The same may probably be said of most of us. In such trials as this that he was anticipating, there is often a special cruelty in the exposure of matters which are for the most part happily kept in the background. A man on some occasion inadvertantly takes a little more wine than is good for him. It is an accident most uncommon with him, and nobody thinks much about it. But chance brings the case to the notice of the police courts, and the poor victim is published to the world as a drunkard in the columns of all the newspapers. Some young girl fancies herself in love, and the man is unworthy. The feeling passes away, and none but herself, and perhaps her mother, are the wiser. But if by some chance, some treachery, a letter should get printed and read, the poor girl's punishment is so severe that she is driven to wish herself in the grave.

He had been foolish, very foolish, as we have seen, on board the Goldfinder,—and wicked too. There could be no doubt about that. When it would all come out in this dreaded trial he would be quite unable to defend himself. There was enough to enable Mrs. Bolton to point at him with a finger of scorn as a degraded sinner. And yet,—yet there had been nothing which he had not dared to own to his wife in the

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secrecy of their mutual confidence, and which, in secret, she had not been able to condone without a moment's hesitation. He had been in love with the woman,—in love after a fashion. He had promised to marry her. He had done worse than that. And then, when he had found that the passion for gold was strong upon her, he had bought his freedom from her. The story would be very bad as told in Court, and yet he had told it all to his wife! She had admitted his excuse when he had spoken of the savageness of his life, of the craving which a man would feel for some feminine society, of her undoubted cleverness, and then of her avarice. And then when he swore that through it all he had still loved her,—her, Hester Bolton,—whom he had but once seen, but whom, having seen, he had never allowed to pass out of his mind, she still believed him, and thought that the holiness of that love had purified him. She believed him;—but who else would believe him? Of course he was most anxious that those people should go.

Before he left London he wrote both to Mr. Seely and to Robert Bolton, saying what he had done. The letter to his own attorney was long and full. He gave an account in detail of the whole matter, declaring that he would not allow himself to be hindered from paying a debt which he believed to be due by the wickedness of those to whom it was owing. "The two things have nothing to do with each other," he said, "and if you choose to throw up my defence, of course you can do so. I cannot allow myself to be debarred from exercising my own judgment in another matter because you think that what I decide upon doing may not tally with your views as to my defence." To Robert Bolton he was much shorter.

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"I think you ought to know what I have done," he said; "at any rate, I do not choose that you should be left in ignorance." Mr. Seely took no notice of the communication, not feeling himself bound to carry out his threat by withdrawing his assistance from his client. But Robert and William Bolton agreed to have Crinkett's movements watched by a detective policeman. They were both determined that if possible Crinkett and the woman should be kept in the country.

In these days the old Squire made many changes in his residence, vacillating between his house in Cambridge and the house at Folking. His books were at Cambridge, and he could not have them brought back; and yet he felt that he ought to evince his constancy to his son, his conviction of his son's innocence, by remaining at Folking. And he was aware, too, that his presence there was a comfort both to his son and Hester. When John Caldigate had gone up to London, his father had been in Cambridge, but on his return he found the old Squire at his old house. "Yes," he said, telling the story of what he had just done, "I have paid twenty thousand pounds out of hand to those rascals, simply because I thought I owed it to them!" The Squire shook his head, not being able to approve of the act. "I don't see why I should have allowed myself to be hindered from doing what I thought to be right because they were doing what they knew to be wrong."

"They won't go, you know."

"I daresay not, sir. Why should they?"

"But the jury will believe that you intended to purchase their absence."

"I think I have made all that clear."

"I am afraid not, John. The man applied to you

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for the money, and was refused. That was the beginning of it. Then the application was repeated by the woman with a threat; and you again refused. Then they present themselves to the magistrates, and make the accusation; and, upon that, you pay the money. Of course it will come out at the trial that you paid it immediately after this renewed application from Bollum. It would have been better to have defied them."

"I did defy them," said John Caldigate. But all that his father said seemed to him to be true, so that he repented himself of what he had done.

He made no inquiry on the subject, but, early in May he heard from Mr. Seely that Crinkett and the woman were still in London, and that they had abandoned the idea of going at once to Australia. According to Mr. Seely's story,—of the truth of which he declared himself to be by no means certain,—Crinkett had wished to go, but had been retained by the woman. "As far as I can learn," said Mr. Seely, "she is in communication with the Boltons, who will of course keep her if it be possible. He would get off if he could; but she, I take it, has got hold of the money. When you made the cheque payable to her order, you effectually provided for their remaining here. If he could have got the money without her name, he would have gone, and she would have gone with him."

"But that was not my object," said Caldigate angrily. Mr. Seely thereupon shrugged his shoulders.

Early in June the man came back who had been sent out to Sydney in February on behalf of Caldigate. He also had been commissioned to seek for evidence, and to bring back with him, almost at any cost, whatever witness or witnesses he might find whose presence in

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England would serve Caldigate's cause. But he brought no one, and had learned very little. He too had been at Ahalala and at Nobble. At Nobble the people were now very full of the subject, and were very much divided in opinion. There were Crinketters and anti-Crinketters, Caldigatites and anti-Caldigatites. A certain number of persons were ready to swear that there had been a marriage, and an equal number, perhaps, to swear that there had been none. But no new fact had been brought to light. Dick Shand had not been found,—who had been living with Caldigate when the marriage was supposed to have been solemnised. Nor had that register been discovered from which the copy of the certificate was supposed to have been taken. All through the Colony,—so said this agent,—a very great interest was felt in the matter. The newspapers from day to day contained paragraphs about it. But nobody had appeared whom it was worth while to bring home. Mrs. Henniker, of the hotel at Nobble, had offered to swear that there had been no marriage. This offer she made and repeated when she had come to understand accurately on whose behalf this last agent had come to the Colony. But then, before she had understood this, she had offered to swear the reverse; and it became known that she was very anxious to be carried back to the old country free of expense. No credible witness could be found who had heard Caldigate call the woman Mrs. Smith after the date assigned to the marriage. She no doubt had used various names, had called herself sometimes Mrs. Caldigate, sometimes Mrs. Smith, but generally, in such documents as she had to sign in reference to her mining shares, Euphemia Cettini. It was by that name that she had been known in Sydney when performing on the stage, and it was

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now alleged on her behalf that she had bought and sold shares in the name under the idea that she would thus best secure to herself their separate and undisturbed possession. Proof was brought home that Caldigate himself had made over to her shares in that name; but Mr. Seely did not depend much on this as proof against the marriage.

Mr. Seely seemed to depend very little on anything,—so little that Caldigate almost wished that he had carried out his threat and thrown up the case. "Does he not believe you when you tell him?" his wife asked. Caldigate was forced to confess that apparently the lawyer did not believe him. In fact, Mr. Seely had even said as much. "In such cases a lawyer should never believe or disbelieve; or, if he does, he should never speak of his belief. It is with your acquittal or conviction that I am concerned, in which matter I can better assist you by cool judgment than by any fervid assurance." All this made Caldigate not only angry but unhappy, for he could not fail to perceive that the public around him were in the same mind as Mr. Seely. In his own parish they believed him, but apparently not beyond his parish. It might be possible that he should escape,—that seemed to be the general opinion; but then general opinion went on to declare that there was no reason for supposing that he had not married the woman merely because he said that he had not done so.

Then gradually there fell upon poor Hester's mind a doubt,—and, after that, almost a conviction. Not a doubt as to her husband's truth! No suspicion on that score ever troubled her for a moment. But there came upon her a fear, almost more than a fear, that these terrible enemies would be strong enough to override the truth, and to carry with them both a judge and a

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jury. As the summer months ran on, they all became aware that for any purpose of removing the witnesses the money had been paid in vain. Crinkett was living in all opulence at a hotel at Brighton; and the woman, calling herself Mrs. Caldigate, had taken furnished apartments in London. Rumour came that she was frequently seen at the theatres, and that she had appeared more than once in an open carriage in the parks. There was no doubt but that Caldigate's money had made them very comfortable for the present. The whole story of the money had been made public, and of course there were various opinions about it. The prevailing idea was, that an attempt had been made to buy off the first wife, but that the first wife had been clever enough to get the money without having to go. Caldigate was thought to have been very foolish; on which subject Bollum once expressed himself strongly to a friend. "Clever!" he said; "Caldigate clever! The greatest idiot I ever came across in my life! I'd made it quite straight for him,—so that there couldn't have been a wrinkle. But he wouldn't have it. There are men so soft that one can't understand 'em." To do Bollum justice it should be said that he was most anxious to induce his uncle and the woman to leave the country when they had got the money.

Though very miserable, Hester was very brave. In the presence of her husband she would never allow herself to seem to doubt. She would speak of their marriage as a thing so holy that nothing within the power of man could disturb it. Of course they were man and wife, and of course the truth would at last prevail. Was not the Lord able, in His own good time, to set all these matters right? And in discussing the matter with him she would always seem to imply that the

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Lord's good time would be the time of the trial. She would never herself hint to him that there might be a period of separation coming. Though in secrecy she was preparing for what might befal him, turning over in her woman's mind how she might best relieve the agony of his jail, she let no sign escape her that she looked forward to such misery. She let no such sign escape her in her intercourse with him. But with his father she could speak more freely. It had, indeed, come to be understood between her and the old Squire, that it would be best that they should discuss the matter openly. Arrangements must be made for their future life, so that when the blow came they might not be unprepared. Hester declared that nothing but positive want of shelter should induce her to go back to Chesterton. "They think him to be all that's bad," she said. "I know him to be all that's good. How is it possible that we should live together?" The old man had, of course, turned it over much in his mind. If it could be true that that woman had in truth become his son's wife, and that this dear, sweet, young mother had been deceived, betrayed, and cheated out of her very existence, then that house at Folking could be no proper home for her. Her grave would be best, but till that might be reached any home would be better than Folking. But he was almost sure that it was not so, and her confidence,—old as he was, and prone to be suspicious—made him confident.

When the moment came he could not doubt how he would answer her. He could not crush her spirit by seeming for a moment to have a suspicion. "Your home, of course, shall be here," he said. "It shall be your own house."

"And you?"

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"It shall be my house too. If it should come to that, we will be, at any rate, together. You shall not be left without a friend."

"It is not for myself," she said; "but for his boy and for him;—what will be best for them. I would take a cabin at the prison-gate, so as to be nearest to him,—if it were only myself." And so it was settled between them that should that great misery fall upon them she would remain at Folking and he would remain with her. Nothing that judge or jury could do would deprive her of the right to occupy her husband's house.

In this way the months of May and June and the first fortnight of July wore themselves away, and then the time for the trial had come. Up to the last it had been hoped that tidings might be heard either by letter or telegram from Dick Shand; but it seemed that he had vanished from the face of the earth. No suggestion of news as to his whereabouts was received on which it might have been possible to found an argument for the further postponement of the trial. Mr. Seely had been anxious for such postponement,—perhaps thinking that as the hotel at Brighton and the carriages in the park were expensive, Crinkett and the lady might take their departure for Australia without saying a word to the lawyer who had undertaken the prosecution. But there was no adequate ground for delay, and on Tuesday the 17th July the trial was to be commenced. On the previous day Caldigate, at his own request, was introduced to Sir John Joram, who had been brought down special to Cambridge for his defence. Mr. Seely had advised him not to see the barrister who was to defend him, leaving it, however, quite at his option to do so or not as he pleased. "Sir John will see you, but I think he had rather not," said

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Mr. Seely. But Caldigate had chosen to have the interview. "I have thought it best to say just one word to you," said Caldigate.

"I am quite at your service," said Sir John.

"I want you to hear from my own lips that a falser charge than this was never made against a man."

"I am glad to hear it," said Sir John,—and then he paused. "That is to say, Mr. Caldigate, I am bound in courtesy to you to make some such civil reply as I should have made had I not been employed in your case, and had circumstances then induced you to make such a statement to me. But in truth, as I am so employed, no statement from your lips ought to affect me in the least. For your own sake I will say that no statement will affect me. It is not for me to believe or disbelieve anything in this matter. If, carried away by my feelings, I were to appeal to the jury for their sympathy because of my belief, I should betray your cause. It will be my duty not to make the jury believe you, who, in your position, will not be expected even to tell the truth; but to induce them, if possible, to disbelieve the witnesses against you who will be on their oath. Second-hand prostestations from an advocate are never of much avail, and in many cases have been prejudicial. I can only assure you that I understand the importance of the interests confided to me, and that I will endeavour to be true to my trust."

Caldigate, who wanted sympathy, who wanted an assurance of confidence in his word, was by no means contented with his counsellor; but he was too wise at the present moment to quarrel with him.

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CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST DAY

THEN came the morning on which Caldigate and Hester must part. Very little had been said about it, but a word or two had been absolutely necessary. The trial would probably take two days, and it would not be well that he should be brought back to Folking for the sad intervening night. And then,—should the verdict be given against him, the prison doors would be closed against her, his wife, more rigidly than against any other friend who might knock at them inquiring after his welfare. Her, at any rate, he would not be allowed to see. All the prison authorities would be bound to regard her as the victim of his crime and as the instrument of his vice. The law would have locked him up to avenge her injuries,—of her, whose only future joy could come from that distant freedom which the fraudulent law would at length allow to him. All this was not put into words between them, but it was understood. It might be that they were to be parted now for a term of years, during which she would be as a widow at Folking while he would be alone in his jail.

There are moments as to which it would be so much better that their coming should never be accomplished! It would have been better for them both had they been separated without that last embrace. He was to start from Folking at eight that he might surrender himself

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to the hands of justice in due time for the trial at ten. She did not come down with him to the breakfast parlour, having been requested by him not to be there among the servants when he took his departure; but standing there in her own room, with his baby in her arms, she spoke her last word, "You will keep up your courage, John?"

"I will try, Hester."

"I will keep up mine. I will never fail, for your sake and his,"—here she held the child a moment away from her bosom,—"I will never allow myself to droop. To be your wife and his mother shall be enough to support me even though you should be torn from both of us for a time."

"I wish I were as brave as you," he said.

"You will leave me here," she continued, "mistress of your house; and if God spares me, here you will find me. They can't move me from this. Your father says so. They may call me what they will, but they cannot move me. There is the Lord above us, and before Him they cannot make me other than your wife,—your wife,—your wife." As she repeated the name, she put the boy out to him, and when he had taken the child, she stretched out her hands upwards, and falling on her knees at his feet, prayed to God for his deliverance. "Let him come back to us, O my God. Deliver him from his enemies, and let him come back to us."

"One kiss, my own," he said, as he raised her from the ground.

"Oh yes;—and a thousand shall be in store for you when you come back to us. Yes; kiss him too. Your boy shall hear the praises of his father every day, till at last he shall understand that he may be proud of you even though he should have learned why it is that you

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are not with him. Now go, my darling. Go; and support yourself by remembering that I have got that within me which will support me." Then he left her.

The old Squire had expressed his intention of being present throughout the trial, and now was ready for the journey. When counselled to remain at home, both by Mr. Seely and by his son, he had declared that only by his presence could he make the world around him understand how confident he was of his son's innocence. So it was arranged, and a place was kept for him next to the attorney. The servants all came out into the hall and shook hands with their young master; and the cook, wiping her eyes with her apron, declared that she would have dinner ready for him on the following day. At the front door Mr. Holt was standing, having come over the ferry to greet the young squire before his departure. "They may say what they will there, squire, but they won't make none of us here believe that you've been the man to injure a lady such as she up there." Then there was another shaking of hands, and the father and son got into the carriage.

The court was full, of course. Mr. Justice Bramber, by whom the case was to be tried, was reputed to be an excellent judge, a man of no softnesses,—able to wear the black cap without convulsive throbbings, anxious also that the law should run its course,—averse to mercy when guilt had been proved, but as clear-sighted and as just as Minos,—a man whom nothing could turn one way or another,—who could hang his friend, but who would certainly not mulct his enemy because he was his enemy. It had reached Caldigate's ears that he was unfortunate in his judge; by which, they who had so said, had intended to imply that this judge's mind would not be perverted by any sentiments as to the prisoner,

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as to the sweet young woman who called herself his wife at home, or as to want of sweetness on the part of the other woman who claimed him.

The jury was sworn in without more than ordinary delay, and then the trial was commenced. That which had to be done for the prosecution seemed to be simple enough. The first witness called was the woman herself, who was summoned in the names of Euphemia Caldigate *alias* Smith. She gave her evidence very clearly, and with great composure,—saying how she had become acquainted with the man on board the ship; how she had been engaged to him at Melbourne; how he had come down to her at Sydney; how, in compliance with his orders, she had followed him up to Ahalala; and how she had there been married to him by Mr. Allan. Then she brought forth the documents which professed to be the copy of the register of the marriage, made by the minister in his own book; and the envelope,—the damning envelope,—which Caldigate was prepared to admit that he had himself addressed to Mrs. Caldigate; and the letter which purported to have been written by the minister to Caldigate, recommending him to be married in some better established township than that existing at Ahalala. She did it well. She was very correct, and at the same time very determined, giving many details of her early theatrical life, which it was thought better to get from her in the comparative ease of a direct examination than to have them extracted afterwards by an adverse advocate. During her evidence in chief, which was necessarily long, she seemed to be quite at ease; but those around her observed that she never once turned her eyes upon him whom she claimed as her husband except when she was asked whether the man there before her was the man she had married at

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Ahalala. Then, looking at him for a moment in silence, she replied very steadily, "Yes; that is my husband, John Caldigate."

To Caldigate and his friends,—and indeed to all those collected in the court,—the most interesting person of the day was Sir John Joram. In a sensational cause the leading barrister for the defence is always the hero of the plot,—the actor from whom the best bit of acting is expected,—the person who is most likely to become a personage on the occasion. The prisoners are necessarily mute, and can only be looked at, not heard. The judge is not expected to do much till the time comes for his charge, and even then is supposed to lower the dignity of the bench if he makes his charge with any view to effect on his own behalf. The barrister who prosecutes should be tame, or he will appear to be vindictive. The witnesses, however interesting they may be in detail, are but episodes. Each comes and goes, and there is an end of them. But the part of the defending advocate requires action through the whole of the piece. And he may be impassioned. He is bound to be on the alert. Everything seems to depend on him. They who accuse can have or should have no longing for the condemnation of the accused one. But in regard to the other, an acquittal is a matter of personal prowess, of professional triumph, and possibly of well simulated feeling.

Sir John Joram was at this time a man of considerable dignity, above fifty years of age, having already served the offices of Solicitor and Attorney-General to his party. To his compeers and intimate friends it seemed to be but the other day since he was Jacky Joram, one the jolliest little fellows ever known at an evening party, up to every kind of fun, always rather

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short of money, and one of whom it was thought that, because he was good-looking, he might some day achieve the success of marrying a woman with money. On a sudden he married a girl without a shilling, and men shook their heads and sighed as they spoke of poor Jacky Joram. But, again, on a sudden,—quite as suddenly,—there came tidings that Jacky had been found out by the attorneys, and that he was earning his bread. As we grow old things seem to come so quickly! His friends had hardly realised the fact that Jacky was earning his bread before he was in Parliament and had ceased to be Jacky. And the celerity with which he became Sir John was the most astonishing of all. Years no doubt had passed by. But years at fifty are no more than months at thirty,—are less than weeks in boyhood. And now while some tongues, by dint of sheer habit, were still forming themselves into Jacky, Sir John Joram had become the leading advocate of the day, and a man renowned for the dignity of his manners.

In the House,—for he had quite got the ear of the House,—a certain impressive good sense, a habit of saying nothing that was not necessary to the occasion, had chiefly made for him the high character he enjoyed; but in the law courts it was perhaps his complaisance, his peculiar courtesy, of which they who praised him talked the most. His aptitude to get verdicts was of course the cause of his success. But it was observed of him that in perverting the course of justice,—which may be said to be the special work of a successful advocate,—he never condescended to bully anybody. To his own witnesses he was simple and courteous, as are barristers generally. But to adverse witnesses he was more courteous, though no doubt less simple. Even to some perjured comrade of an habitual

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burglar he would be studiously civil: but to a woman such as Euphemia Caldigate, *alias* Smith, it was certain that he would be so smooth as to make her feel almost pleased with the amenities of her position.

He asked her very many questions, offering to provide her with the comfort of a seat if it were necessary. She said that she was not at all tired, and that she preferred to stand. As to the absolute fact of the marriage she did not hesitate at all. She was married in the tent at Ahalala in the presence of Crinkett and Adamson, and of her own female companion, Anna Young,—all of whom were there to give evidence of the fact. Whether anyone else was in the tent, she could not say, but she knew that there were others at the entrance. The tent was hardly large enough for more than five or six. Dick Shand had not been there, because he had always been her enemy, and had tried to prevent the marriage. And she was quite clear about the letter. There was a great deal said about the letter. She was sure that the envelope with the letter had come to her at Ahalala by post from Sydney when her husband was at the latter place. The Sydney postmark with the date was very plain. There was much said as to the accuracy and clearness of the Sydney postmark, and something as to the absence of any postmark at Nobble. She could not account for the absence of the Nobble postmark. She was aware that letters were stamped at Nobble generally. Mr. Allan, she said, had himself handed to her the copy of the register almost immediately after the marriage, but she could not say by whom it had been copied. The letter purporting to be from Mr. Allan to her husband was no doubt, she said, in the minister's handwriting. Caldigate had showed it to her before their marriage, and she had kept

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it without any opposition from him. Then she was asked as to her residence after her marriage, and here she was less clear. She had lived with him first at Ahalala and then at Nobble, but she could not say for how long. It had been off and on. There had been quarrels, and after a time they had agreed to part. She had received from him a certain amount of mining shares and of money, and had undertaken in return never to bother him any more. There was a great deal said about times and dates, which left an impression upon those around her in the court that she was less sure of her facts than a woman in such circumstances naturally would have been.

Then Sir John produced the letter which she had written to Caldigate, and in which she had distinctly offered to marry Crinkett if the money demanded were paid. She must have expected the production of this letter, but still, for a few moments, it silenced her. "Yes," she said, at last, "I wrote it."

"And the money you demanded has been paid?"

"Yes, it has been paid. But not then. It was not paid till we came over."

"But if it had been paid then you would have—married Mr. Crinkett?" Sir John's manner as he asked the question was so gentle and so soft that it was felt by all to contain an apology for intruding on so delicate a subject. But when she hesitated he did, after a pause, renew his inquiry in another form. "Perhaps this was only a threat, and you had no purpose of carrying it out."

Then she plucked up her courage. "I have not married him," she said.

"But did you intend it?"

"I did. What were the laws to me out there? He

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had left me and had taken another wife. I had to do the best for myself. I did intend it. But I didn't do it. A woman can't be tried for her intentions."

"No," said Sir John. "But she may be judged by her intentions."

Then she was asked why she had not gone when she had got the money, according to her promise. "He defied us," she said, "and called us bad names,—liars and perjurers. He knew that we were not liars. And then we were watched and told that we might not go. As he said that he was indifferent, I was willing enough to stay and see it out."

"You cannot give us," he asked again,—and this was his last question,—"any clearer record of those months which you lived with your husband?"

"No," she said, "I cannot. I kept no journal." Then she was allowed to go, and though she had been under examination for three hours, it was thought she had escaped easily.

Crinkett was the next, who swore that he had been Caldigate's partner in sundry mining speculations,—that they had been in every way intimate,—that he had always recommended Caldigate to marry Mrs. Smith, thinking, as he said, "that respectability paid in the long run,"—and that, having so advised him, he had become Caldigate's special friend at the time, to the exclusion of Dick Shand, who was generally drunk, and who, whether drunk or sober, was opposed to the marriage. He had been selected to stand by his friend at the marriage, and he, thinking that another witness would be beneficial, had taken Adamson with him. His only wonder was that anyone should dispute a fact which was at the time so notorious both at Ahalala and at Nobble. He held his head high during his evidence

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in chief, and more than once called the prisoner "Caldigate,"—"Caldigate knew this," and "Caldigate did that." It was past four when he was handed over for cross-examination; but when it was said that another hour would suffice for it, the judge agreed to sit for that other hour.

But it was nearly two hours before the gentleman who was with Sir John had finished his work, during which Mr. Crinkett seemed to suffer much. The gentleman was by no means so complacent as Sir John, and asked some very disagreeable questions. Had Crinkett intended to commit bigamy by marrying the last witness, knowing at the time that she was a married woman? "I never said that I intended to marry her," said Crinkett. "What she wrote to Caldigate was nothing to me." He could not be made to own, as she had done, in a straightforward way, that he had intended to set the law at defiance. His courage failed him, and his presence of mind, and he was made to declare at last that he had only talked about such a marriage, with the view of keeping the woman in good humour, but that he had never intended to marry her. Then he was asked as to Bollum;—had he told Bollum that he intended to marry the woman? At last he owned that he might have done so. Of course he had been anxious to get his money, and he had thought that he might best do so by such an offer. He was reduced to much misery during his cross-examination; but on the one main statement that he had been present at the marriage he was not shaken.

At six o'clock the trial was adjourned till the next day, and the two Caldigates were taken in a fly to a neighbouring inn, at which rooms had been provided for them. Here they were soon joined by Mr. Seely,

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who explained, however, that he had come merely to make arrangements for the morrow. "How is it going?" asked Caldigate.

The question was very natural, but it was one which Mr. Seely was not disposed to answer. "I couldn't give an opinion," he said. "In such cases I never do give an opinion. The evidence is very clear, and has not been shaken; but the witnesses are people of a bad character. Character goes a long way with a jury. It will depend a good deal on the judge, I should say. But I cannot give an opinion."

No opinion one way or the other was expressed to the father or son,—who indeed saw no one else the whole evening; but Robert Bolton, in discussing the matter with his father, expressed a strong conviction that Caldigate would be acquitted. He had heard it all, and understood the nature of such cases. "I do not in the least doubt that they were married," said Robert Bolton. "All the circumstances make me sure of it. But the witnesses are just of that kind which a jury always distrusts. The jury will acquit him, not because they do not believe the marriage, but out of enmity to Crinkett and the woman."

"What shall we do, then?" asked the old man. To this Robert Bolton could make no answer. He only shook his head and turned away.

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CHAPTER X

THE SECOND DAY

THE court had been very full on the first day of the trial, but on the following morning it was even more crowded, so that outsiders who had no friend connected with justice had hardly a chance of hearing or seeing anything. Many of the circumstances of the case had long been known to the public, but matters of new and of peculiar interest had been elicited,—the distinct promise made by the woman to marry another man, so as to render her existing husband safe in his bigamy by committing bigamy herself,—the payment to these people by Caldigate of an immense sum of money,—the fact that they two had lived together in Australia whether married or not;—all this, which had now been acknowledged on both sides, added to the romance of the occasion. While it could hardly be doubted, on the one side, that Caldigate had married the woman,—so strong was the evidence,—it could not be at all doubted, on the other side, that the accusation had been planned with the view of raising money, and had been the result of a base conspiracy. And then there was the additional marvel, that though the money had been paid,—the whole sum demanded,—yet the trial was carried on. The general feeling was exactly that which Robert Bolton had attributed to the jury. People did believe that there had been a marriage, but trusted nevertheless that Caldigate might be acquitted,—so that his recent mar-

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riage might be established. No doubt there was a feeling with many that anything done in the wilds of Australia ought not "to count here" at home in England.

Caldigate with his father was in court a little before ten, and at that hour punctually the trial was commenced. The first business was the examination of Adamson, who was quite clear as to the marriage. He had been concerned with Crinkett in money operations for many years, and had been asked by him to be present simply as a witness. He had never been particularly intimate with Caldigate, and had had little or nothing to do with him afterwards. He was cross-examined by the second gentleman, but was not subjected to much annoyance. He had put what little money he possessed into the Polyeuka mine, and had come over to England because he had thought that, by so doing, he might perhaps get a portion of his money back. Had there been a conspiracy, and was he one of the conspirators? Well, he rather thought that there had been a conspiracy, and that he was one of the conspirators. But then he had only conspired to get what he thought to be his own. He had lost everything in the Polyeuka mine; and as the gentleman no doubt had married the lady, he thought he might as well come forward,—and that perhaps in that way he would get his money. He did not mind saying that he had received a couple of thousand pounds, which was half what he had put into Polyeuka. He hoped that, after paying all his expenses, he would be able to start again at the diggings with something above a thousand. This was all straight sailing. The purpose which he had in view was so manifest that it had hardly been worth while to ask him the questions.

Anna Young was the next, and she encountered the

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sweet courtesies of Sir John Joram. These sweet courtesies were prolonged for above an hour, and were not apparently very sweet to Miss Young. Of the witnesses hitherto examined she was the worst. She had been flippantly confident in her memories of the marriage ceremony when questioned on behalf of the prosecution, but had forgotten everything in reference to her friend's subsequent married life. She had forgotten even her own life, and did not quite know where she had lived. And at last she positively refused to answer questions though they were asked with the most engaging civility. She said that, "Of course a lady had affairs which she could not tell to everybody." "No, she didn't mean lovers;—she didn't care for the men at all." "Yes; she did mean money. She had done a little mining, and hoped to do a little more." "She was to have a thousand pounds and her expenses, but she hadn't got the money yet,"—and so on. Probably of all the witnesses yet examined Miss Young had amused the court the most.

There were many others, no doubt necessary for the case, but hardly necessary for the telling of the story. Captain Munday was there, the captain of the Goldfinder, who spoke of Caldigate's conduct on board, and of his own belief that they two were engaged when they left the ship. "As we are prepared to acknowledge that there was an engagement, I do not think that we need trouble you, Captain Munday," said Sir John. "We only deny the marriage." Then the cheque for twenty thousand pounds was produced, and clerks from the bank to prove the payment, and the old waiter from the Jericho Coffee-house,—and others of whom Sir John Joram refused to take any notice whatever. All that had been acknowledged. Of course the money had been

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paid. Of course the intimacy had existed. No doubt there had been those interviews both at Folking and up in London. But had there ever been a marriage in that tent at Ahalala? That, and that only, was the point to which Sir John Joram found it necessary to give attention.

A slight interval was allowed for lunch, and then Sir John rose to begin his speech. It was felt on all sides that his speech was to be the great affair of the trial. Would he be able so to represent these witnesses as to make a jury believe that they had sworn falsely, and that the undoubted and acknowledged conspiracy to raise money had been concocted without any basis of truth? There was a quarter of an hour during which the father remained with his son in the precincts of the prison, and then the judge and the lawyers, and all they whose places were assured to them trooped back into court. They who were less privileged had fed themselves with pocketed sandwiches, not caring to risk the loss of their seats.

Sir John Joram began by holding, extended in his fingers towards the jury, the envelope which had undoubtedly been addressed by Caldigate to "Mrs. Caldigate, Ahalala, Nobble," and in which a certain letter had been stated to have been sent by him to her. "The words written on that envelope," said he, "are to my mind the strongest evidence I have ever met of the folly to which a man may be reduced by the softness of feminine intercourse. I acknowledge, on the part of my client, that he wrote these words. I acknowledge, that if a man could make a woman his wife by so describing her on a morsel of paper, this man would have made this woman his wife. I acknowledge so much, though I do not acknowledge, though I deny, that any letter was

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ever sent to this woman in the envelope which I hold in my hand. His own story is that he wrote those words at a moment of soft and foolish confidence, when they two together were talking of a future marriage,—a marriage which no doubt was contemplated, and which probably had been promised. Then he wrote the address, showing the woman the name which would be hers should they ever be married;—and she has craftily kept the document. That is his story. That is my story. Now I must show you why I think it also should be your story. The woman,—I must describe her in this way lest I should do her an injustice by calling her Mrs. Smith, or do my client an injustice by calling her Mrs. Caldigate,—has told you that this envelope, with an enclosure which she produced, reached her at Nobble through the post from Sydney. To that statement I call upon you to give no credit. A letter so sent would, as you have been informed, bear two postmarks, those of Sydney and of Nobble. This envelope bears one only. But that is not all. I shall call before you two gentlemen experienced in affairs of the post-office, and they will tell you that the postmarks on this envelope, both that of the town, Sydney, and that by which the postage stamp is obliterated, are cleaner, finer, and better perceived than they would have been had it passed in ordinary course through the post-office. Letters in the post-office are hurried quickly through the operation of stamping, so that one passing over the other while the stamping ink is still moist, will to some extent blot and blur that with which it has come in contact. He will produce some dozens taken at random, and will show that with them all such has been the case. This blotting, this smudging, is very slight, but it exists; it is always there. He will tell you that this envelope

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has been stamped as one and alone,—by itself,—with peculiar care;—and I shall ask you to believe that the impression has been procured by fraud in the Sydney post-office. If that be so; if in such a case as this fraud be once discovered, then I say that the whole case will fall to the ground, and that I shall be justified in telling you that no word that you have heard from these four witnesses is worthy of belief.

"Nothing worthy of belief has been adduced against my client unless that envelope be so. That those four persons have conspired together for the sake of getting money is clear enough. To their evidence I shall come presently, and shall endeavour to show you why you should discredit them. At present I am concerned simply with this envelope, on which I think that the case hangs. As for the copy of the register it is nothing. It would be odd indeed if in any conspiracy so much as that could not be brought up. Had such a register been found in the archives of any church, however humble, and had an attested copy been produced, that would have been much. But this is nothing. Nor is the alleged letter from Mr. Allan anything. Were the letter genuine it would show that such a marriage had been contemplated, not that it had been solemnised. We have, however, no evidence to make us believe that the letter is genuine. But this envelope,"—and he again stretched it out towards the jury;—"is evidence. The impression of a post-office stamp has often been accepted as evidence. But the evidence may be false evidence, and it is for us to see whether it may not probably be so now.

"In the first place, such evidence requires peculiar sifting, which unfortunately cannot be applied to it in the present case, because it has been brought to us from

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a great distance. Had the envelope been in our possession from the moment in which the accusation was first made, we might have tested it, either by sending it to Sydney or by obtaining from Sydney other letters or documents bearing the same stamp, affixed undoubtedly on the date here represented. But that has not been within our power. The gentleman whom I shall bring before you will tell you that these impressions or stamps have a knack of verifying themselves, which makes it very dangerous indeed for fraudulent persons to tamper with them. A stamp used in June will be hardly the same as it will be in July. Some little bruise will have so altered a portion of the surface as to enable detection to be made with a microscope. And the stamp used in 1870 will certainly have varied its form in 1871. Now, I maintain that time and opportunity should have been given us to verify this impression. Copies of all impressions from day to day are kept in the Sydney post-office, and if it be found that on this day named, the 10th of May, no impression in the Sydney office is an exact fac-simile of this impression, then I say that this impression has been subsequently and fraudulently obtained, and that the only morsel of corroborative evidence offered to you will be shown to be false evidence. We have been unable to get impressions of this date. Opportunities have not been given to us. But I do not hesitate to tell you that you should demand such opportunities before you accept that envelope as evidence on which you can send my client to jail, and deprive that young wife, whom he has made his own, of her husband, and afford the damning evidence of your verdict towards robbing his son of his legitimacy."

He said very much more about the envelope, clearly showing his own appreciation of its importance, and

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declaring again and again that if he could show that a stain of perjury affected the evidence in any one point all the evidence must fall to the ground, and that if there were ground to suspect that the envelope had been tampered with, then that stain of perjury would exist. After that he went on to the four conspirators, as he called them, justifying the name by their acknowledged object of getting money from his client. "That they came to this country as conspirators, with a fraudulent purpose, my learned friend will not deny."

"I acknowledge nothing of the kind," said the learned friend.

"Then my learned friend must feel that his is a case in which he cannot safely acknowledge anything. I do not doubt, gentlemen, but that you have made up your mind on that point." He went on to show that they clearly were conspirators;—that they had confessed as much themselves. "It is no doubt possible that my client may have married this female conspirator, and she is not the less entitled to protection from the law because she is a conspirator. Nor, because she is a conspirator, should he be less amenable to the law for the terrible injury he would then have done to that other lady. But if they be conspirators,—if it be shown to you that they came to this country,—not that the woman might claim her husband, not that the others might give honest testimony against a great delinquent, —but in order that they might frighten him out of money, then I am entitled to tell you that you should not rest on their evidence unless it be supported, and that the fact of their conspiracy gives you a right, nay, makes it your imperative duty, to suspect perjury."

The remainder of the day was taken up with Sir John's speech, and with the witnesses which he called

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for the defence. He certainly succeeded in strengthening the compassion which was felt for Caldigate and for the unfortunate young mother at Folking. "It was very well," he said, "for my learned friend to tell you of the protection which is due to a married woman when a husband has broken the law, and betrayed his trust by taking another wife to himself, as this man is accused of having done. But there is another aspect in which you will regard the question. Think of that second wife and of her child, and of the protection which is due to her. You well know that she does not suspect her husband, that she fears nothing but a mistaken verdict from you,—that she will be satisfied, much more than satisfied, if you will leave her in possession of her home, her husband, and the unalloyed domestic happiness she has enjoyed since she joined her lot with his. Look at the one woman, and then at the other. Remember their motives, their different lives, their different joys, and what will be the effect of your verdict upon each of them. If you are satisfied that he did marry that woman, that vile woman the nature of whose life has been sufficiently exposed to you, of course your verdict must be against him. The law is the law and must be vindicated. In that case it will be your duty, your terrible duty, to create misery, to destroy happiness, to ruin a dear innocent young mother and her child, and to separate a loving couple, every detail of whose life is such as to demand your sympathy. And this you must do at the bidding of four greedy foul conspirators. Innocent, sweet, excellent in all feminine graces as is the one wife,—unlovely, unfeminine, and abhorrent as is the other,—you must do your duty. God forbid that I should ask you to break an oath, even for the sake of that young mother. But in such a case, I

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do think, I may ask you to be very careful as to what evidence you accept. I do think that I may again point out to you that those four witnesses, bound as they are together by a bond of avarice, should be regarded but as one,—and as one to whose sworn evidence no credit is due unless it be amply corroborated. I say that there is no corroboration. This envelope would be strong corroboration if it had been itself trustworthy." When he sat down the feeling in court was certainly in favour of John Caldigate.

Then a cloud of witnesses were brought up for the defence, each of whom, however, was soon despatched. The two clerks from the post-office gave exactly the evidence which Sir John had described, and exposed to the jury their packet of old letters. In their opinion the impression on the envelope was finer and cleaner than that generally produced in the course of business. Each of them thought it not improbable that the impression had been surreptitiously obtained. But each of them acknowledged, on cross-examination, that a stamp so clean and perfect might be given and maintained without special care; and each of them said that it was quite possible that a letter passing through the post-office might escape the stamp of one of the offices in which it would be manipulated.

Then there came the witnesses as to character, and evidence was given as to Hester's determination to remain with the man whom she believed to be her husband. As to this there was no cross-examination. That Caldigate's life had been useful and salutary since his return to Folking no one doubted,—nor that he had been a loving husband. If he had committed bigamy, it was, no doubt, for the public welfare that such a crime should be exposed and punished. But that he should

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have been a bigamist, would be a pity,—oh, such a pity! The pity of it; oh, the pity of it! For now there had been much talk of Hester and her home at Folking, and her former home at Chesterton; and people everywhere concerned themselves for her peace, for her happiness, for her condition of life.

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CHAPTER XI

THE LAST DAY

After Sir John Joram's speech, and when the work of the second day had been brought to a close, Caldigate allowed his hopes to rise higher than they had ever mounted since he had first become aware that the accusation would in truth be brought against him. It seemed to be almost impossible that any jury should give a verdict in opposition to arguments so convincing as those Sir John had used. All those details which had appeared to himself to be so damning to his own cause now melted away, and seemed to be of no avail. And even Mr. Seely, when he came to see his client in the evening, was less oppressive than usual. He did not, indeed, venture to express hope, but in his hopelessness he was somewhat more hopeful than before. "You must remember, Mr. Caldigate," he said, "that you have not yet heard the judge, and that with such a jury the Judge will go much further than any advocate. I never knew a Cambridgeshire jury refuse to be led by Judge Bramber."

"Why a Cambridgeshire jury?" asked old Mr. Caldigate; "and why Judge Bramber especially?"

"We are a little timid, I think, here in the eastern counties,—a little wanting in self-confidence. An advocate in the north of England has a finer scope, because the people like to move counter to authority. A Lancashire jury will generally be unwilling to do what

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a judge tells them. And then Judge Bramber has a peculiar way of telling a jury. If he has a strong opinion of his own he never leaves the jury in doubt about it. Some judges are—what I call flabby, Mr. Caldigate. They are a little afraid of responsibility, and leave the jury and the counsel to fight it out among them. Sir John did it very well, no doubt;—very well. He made the best he could of that postage stamp, though I don't know that it will go for much. The point most in our favour is that those Australians are a rough lot to look at. The woman has been drinking, and has lost her good looks,—so that the jurymen won't be soft about her." Caldigate, when he heard this, thought of Euphemia Smith on board the Goldfinder, when she certainly did not drink, when her personal appearance was certainly such as might touch the heart of any juryman. Gold and drink together had so changed the woman that he could hardly persuade himself that she was that forlorn attractive female whom he had once so nearly loved.

Before he went to bed, Caldigate wrote to his wife as he had done also on the preceding evening. "There is to be another long, tedious, terrible day, and then it may be that I shall be able to write no more. For your sake, almost more than for my own, I am longing for it to be over. It would be vain for me to attempt to tell you all that took place. I do not dare to give you hope which I know may be fallacious. And yet I feel my own heart somewhat higher than it was when I wrote last night." Then he did tell her something of what had taken place, speaking in high praise of Sir John Joram. "And now my own, own wife, my real wife, my beloved one, I have to call you so, perhaps, for the last time for years. If these men shall choose

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to think that I married that woman, we shall have to be so parted that it would be better for us to be in our graves. But even then I will not give up all hope. My father has promised that the whole colony shall be ransacked till proof be found of the truth. And then, though I shall have been convicted, I shall be reinstated in my position as your husband. May God Almighty bless you, and our boy, till I may come again to claim my wife and my child without disgrace."

The old man had made the promise. "I would go myself," said he, "were it not that Hester will want my support here." For there had been another promise made,—that by no entreaty, no guile, no force, should Hester be taken from Folking to Chesterton.

Early on the third day Judge Bramber began his charge, and in doing so he told the jury that it would occupy him about three hours. And in exactly three hours time he had completed his task. In summing up the case he certainly was not "flabby";—so little so, that he left no doubt on the minds of any who heard him of the verdict at which he had himself arrived. He went through the evidence of the four chief witnesses very carefully, and then said that the antecedents of these people, or even their guilt, if they had been guilty, had nothing to do with the case except in so far as it might affect the opinion of the jury as to their veracity. They had been called conspirators. Even though they had conspired to raise money by threats, than which nothing could be more abominable,—even though by doing so they should have subjected themselves to criminal proceedings, and to many penalties,—that would not lessen the criminality of the accused if such a marriage as that described had in truth taken place. "This," said the judge, "is so much a matter of course that I

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should not insist upon it had it not been implied that the testimony of these four persons is worth nothing because they are conspirators. It is for you to judge what their testimony is worth, and it is for you to remember that they are four distinct witnesses, all swearing to the same thing." Then he went into the question of the money. There could be no doubt that the four persons had come to England with the purpose of getting money out of the accused, and that they had succeeded. With their mode of doing this,—whether criminal or innocent,—the jury had nothing to do, except as it affected their credit. But they were bound to look to Caldigate's motive in paying so large a sum. It had been shown that he did not owe them a shilling, and that when the application for money reached him from Australia he had refused to give them a shilling. Then, when they had arrived here in England, accusation was made; and when they had offered to desert the case if paid the money, then the money was paid. The prisoner, when paying it, had no doubt intimated to those who received it that he made no bargain with them as to their going away. And he had taken a friend with him who had given his evidence in court, and this friend had manifestly been taken to show that the money was not secretly paid. The jury would give the prisoner the benefit of all that,—if there was benefit to be derived from it. But they were bound to remember, in coming to their verdict, that a very large sum of money had been paid to the witnesses by the prisoner, which money certainly was not due to them.

He dwelt, also, at great length on the stamp on the envelope, but contrived at last to leave a feeling on the minds of those who heard him, that Sir John had shown the weakness of his case by trusting so much to

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such allegations as he had made. "It has been represented," said Judge Bramber, "that the impression which you have seen of the Sydney post-office stamp has been fraudulently obtained. Some stronger evidence should, I think, be shown of this before you believe it. Two clerks from the London post-office have told you that they believed the impression to be a false one; but I think they were hardly justified in their opinion. They founded it on the clearness and cleanness of the impression; but they both of them acknowledged afterwards that such clearness and cleanness is simply unusual, and by no means impossible,—not indeed improbable. But how would it have been if the envelope had been brought to you without any post-office impression, simply directed to Mrs. Caldigate, by the man who is alleged to have made the woman his wife shortly before the envelope was written? Would it not in that case have been strong evidence? If any fraud were proved,—such a fraud as would be that of getting some post-office official falsely to stamp the envelope,—then the stain of perjury would be there. But it will be for you to consider whether you can find such stain of perjury merely because the impression on the envelope is clear and clean."

When he came to the present condition of Caldigate's wife and child at Folking, he was very tender in his speech,—but even his tenderness seemed to turn itself against the accused.

"Of that poor lady I can only speak with that unfeigned respect which I am sure you all feel. That she was happy in her marriage till this accusation reached her ears, no one can doubt. That he to whom she was given in marriage has done his duty by her, treating her with full affection and confidence, has been

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proved to us. Who can think that such a condition of things shall be disturbed, that happiness so perfect is to be turned to misery and misfortune, without almost an agony of regret? But not on that account can you be in any way released from your duty. In this case you are not entitled to think of the happiness or unhappiness of individuals. You have to confine yourself to the evidence, and must give your verdict in accordance with that."

John Caldigate, as he heard the words, told himself at once that the judge had, in fact, desired the jury to find a verdict against him. Not a single point had been made in his favour, and every point had been made to tell against him. The judge had almost said that a man's promise to marry a woman should be taken as evidence of marriage. But the jury, at any rate, did not show immediate alacrity in the obeying the judge's behest. They returned once or twice to ask questions; and at three o'clock Caldigate was allowed to go to his inn, with an intimation that he must hold himself in readiness to be brought back and hear the verdict at a moment's notice. "I wish they would declare it at once," he said to his father. "The suspense is worse than all."

During the afternoon the matter was discussed very freely throughout the borough. "I thought they would have agreed almost at once," said the mayor, at about four o'clock, to Mr. Seely, who, at this moment, had retired to his own office, where the great magistrate of the borough was closeted with him. The mayor had been seated on the bench throughout the trial, and had taken much interest in the case. "I never imagined that there could be much doubt after Judge Bramber's summing up."

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"I hear that there's one man holding out," said the attorney in a low voice.

"Who is it?" whispered the mayor. The mayor and Mr. Seely were very intimate.

"I suppose it's Jones, the tanner at Ely. They say that the Caldigates have had dealings with his family from generation to generation. I knew all about it, and when they passed his name, I wondered that Burder hadn't been sharper." Mr. Burder was the gentleman who had got up the prosecution on the part of the Crown.

"It must be something of that kind," said the mayor. "Nothing else would make a jury hesitate after such a charge as that. I suppose he did marry her." Mr. Seely shrugged his shoulders. "I have attended very closely to the case, and I knew I should have been against him on a jury. God bless my soul! Did any man ever write to a woman as his wife without having married her?"

"It has been done, I should think."

"And that nobody should have been got to say that they weren't man and wife."

"I really have hardly formed an opinion," said Mr. Seely, still whispering, "I am inclined to think that there was probably some ceremony, and that Caldigate salved his conscience when he married Bolton's daughter, by an idea that the ceremony wasn't valid. But they'll convict him at last. When he told me that he had been up to town and paid that money, I knew it was all up with him. How can any juryman believe that a man will pay twenty thousand pounds, which he doesn't owe, to his sworn enemy, merely on a point of conscience?"

At the same time the old banker was sitting in his

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room at the bank, and Robert Bolton was with him. "There cannot be a doubt of his guilt," said Robert Bolton.

"No, no, not a doubt."

"But the jury may disagree?"

"What shall we do then?" said the banker.

"There must be another trial. We must go on till we get a verdict."

"And Hester? What can we do for Hester?"

"She is very obstinate, and I fear we have no power. Even though she is declared not to be his wife, she can choose her own place of living. If he is convicted, I think that she would come back. Of course she ought to come back."

"Of course, of course."

"Old Caldigate, too, is very obstinate; but it may be that we should be able to persuade him. He will know that she ought to be with her mother."

"Her poor mother! Her poor mother! And when he comes out of prison?"

"Her very nature will have been altered by that time," said the attorney. "She will, I trust, have consented before that to take up her residence under your roof."

"I shall be dead," said the old man. "Disgrace and years together will have killed me before that time comes."

The Smirkies were staying at Babington, and the desire for news there was very intent. Mr. Smirkie was full of thought on the matter, but was manifestly in favour of a conviction. "Yes; the poor young woman is very much to be pitied," he said, in answer to the squire, who had ventured to utter a word in favour of Hester. "A young woman who falls into the hands

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of an evil man must always be pitied; but it is to prevent the evil men from preying upon the weaker sex that examples such as these are needed. When we think what might have been the case here, in this house, we have all of us a peculiar reason to be thankful for the interposition of divine Providence." Here Mr. Smirkie made a little gesture of thanksgiving, thanking Heaven for its goodness to his wife in having given her himself. "Julia, my love, you have a very peculiar reason to be thankful, and I trust you are so. Yes,—we must pity the poor young lady; but it will be well that the offender should be made subject to the outraged laws of his country." Mrs. Smirkie, as she listened to these eloquent words, closed her eyes and hands in token of her thankfulness for all that Providence had done for her.

If she knew how to compare her condition with that of poor Hester at this time, she had indeed cause for thankfulness. Hester was alone with her baby, and with no information but what had been conveyed to her by her husband's letters. As she read the last of the two she acknowledged to herself that too probably she would not even see his handwriting again till the period of his punishment should have expired. And then? What would come then? Sitting alone, at the open window of her bedroom, with her boy on her lap, she endeavoured to realise her own position. She would be a mother, without a husband,—with her bastard child. However innocent he might be, such would be her position under the law. It did not suffice that they too should be man and wife as thoroughly as any whom God had joined together, if twelve men assembled together in a jury-box should say otherwise. She had told him that she would be brave;—but how should she

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be brave in such a condition as this? What should she do? How should she look forward to the time of his release? Could anything ever again give her back her husband, and make him her own in the eyes of men? Could anything make men believe that he had always been her own, and that there had been no flaw? She had been very brave when they had attempted to confine her, to hold her by force at Chesterton. Then she had been made strong, had always been comforted, by opposition. The determination of her purpose to go back had supported her. But now,—how should it be with her now? and with her boy? and with him?

The old man was very good, good and eager in her cause, and would let her live at Folking. But what would they call her? When they wrote to her from Chesterton how would they address her letters? Never, never would she soil her fingers by touching a document that called her by any other name than her own. Yes, her own;—let all the jurymen in all the counties, let all the judges on the bench, say what they would to the contrary. Though it should be for all her life,—though there should never come the day on which they,—they,—the world at large would do him justice and her, though they should call her by what hard name they would, still up there, in the courts of her God, she would be his wife. She would be a pure woman there, and here in this world, though she could never more be a wife in all things, she would be a wife in love, a wife in care, a wife in obedience, a wife in all godly truth. And though it would never be possible for her to show her face again among mankind, never for her, surely the world would be kinder to her boy! They would not begrudge him his name! And when it should be told how it had come to pass that there was a blot upon his

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escutcheon, they would not remind him of his mother's misery. But, above all, there should be no shade of doubt as to her husband. "I know," she said, speaking aloud, but not knowing that she spoke aloud, "I know that he is my husband." Then there was a knock at the door. "Well; yes;—has it come? Do you know?"

No; nothing was known there at that moment, but in another minute all would be known. The wheels of the old Squire's carriage had been heard upon the gravel. "No, ma'am, no. You shall not leave the room," said the nurse. "Stay here and let him come to you."

"Is he alone?" she asked. But the woman did not know. The wheels of the carriage had only been heard.

Alas, alas! he was alone. His heart too had been almost broken as he bore the news home to the wife who was a wife no longer.

"Father!" she said, when she saw him.

"My daughter;—oh, my daughter!" And then, with their hands clasped together, they sat speechless and alone, while the news was spread through the household which the old man did not dare to tell to his son's wife.

It was very slowly that the actual tidings reached her ears. Mr. Caldigate, when he tried to tell them, found that the power of words had left him. Old as he was, and prone to cynic indifference as he had shown himself, he was affected almost like a young girl. He sobbed convulsively as he hung over her, embracing her. "My daughter!" he said, "my daughter! my daughter!"

But at last it was all told. Caldigate had been declared guilty, and the judge had condemned him to the

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confined to prison for two years. Judge Bramber had told him that, in his opinion, the jury could have found no other verdict; but he went on to say that, looking for some excuse for so terrible a deed as that which had been done,—so terrible for that poor lady who was now left nameless with a nameless infant,—he could imagine that the marriage, though legally solemnised, had nevertheless been so deficient in the appearances of solemnity as to have imbued the husband with the idea that it had not meant all that a marriage would have meant if celebrated in a church and with more of the outward appurtenances of religion. On that account he refrained from inflicting a severer penalty.

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CHAPTER XII

AFTER THE VERDICT

WHEN the verdict was given, Caldigate was at once marched round into the dock, having hitherto been allowed to sit in front of the dock between Mr. Seely and his father. But, standing in the dock, he heard the sentence pronounced upon him. "I never married the woman, my lord," he said in a loud voice. But what he said could be of no avail. And then men looked at him as he disappeared with the jailers down the steps leading to regions below, and away to his prison, and they knew that he would no more be seen or heard of for two years. He had vanished. But there was the lady who was not his wife out at Folking,—the lady whom the jury had declared not to be his wife. What would become of her?

There was an old gentleman there in the court who had known Mr. Caldigate for many years,—one Mr. Ryder, who had been himself a practising barrister, but had now retired. In those days they seldom saw each other; but, nevertheless, they were friends. "Caldigate," he said, "you had better let her go back to her own people."

"She shall stay with me," he replied.

"Better not. Believe me, she had better not. If so, how will it be with her when he is released? The two years will soon go by, and then she will be in his

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house. If that woman should die, he might marry her, but till then she had better be with her own people."

"She shall stay with me," the old man said again, repeating the words angrily, and shaking his head. He was so stunned by the blow that he could not argue the matter, but he knew that he had made the promise, and that he was resolved to abide by it.

She had better go back to her own people! All the world was saying it. She had no husband now. Everybody would respect her misfortune. Everybody would acknowledge her innocence. All would sympathise with her. All would love her. But she must go back to her own people. There was not a dissentient voice. "Of course she must go back to you now," Nicholas Bolton said to her father, and Nicholas Bolton seldom interfered in anything. "The poor lady will of course be restored to her family," the judge had said in private to his marshal, and the marshal had of course made known what the judge had said. On the next morning there came a letter from William Bolton to Robert. "Of course Hester must come back now. Nothing else is possible." Everybody decided that she must come back. It was a matter which admitted of no doubt. But how was she to be brought to Chesterton?

None of them who decided with so much confidence as to her future understood her ideas of her position as a wife. "I am bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh," she said to herself, "made so by a sacrament which no jury can touch. What matters what the people say? They may make me more unhappy than I am. They may kill me by their cruelty. But they cannot make me believe myself not to be his wife. And while I am his wife, I will obey him, and him only."

What she called "their cruelty" manifested itself

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very soon. The first person who came to her was Mrs. Robert Bolton, and her visit was made on the day after the verdict. When Hester sent down word begging to be permitted in her misery to decline to see even her sister-in-law, Mrs. Robert sent her up a word or two written in pencil—"My darling, whom have you nearer? Who loves you better than I?" Then the wretched one gave way, and allowed her brother's wife to be brought to her. She was already dressed from head to foot in black, and her baby was with her.

The arguments which Mrs. Robert Bolton used need not be repeated, but it may be said that the words she used were so tender, and that they were urged with so much love, so much sympathy, and so much personal approval, that Hester's heart was touched. "But he is my husband," Hester said. "The judge cannot alter it; he is my husband."

"I will not say a word to the contrary. But the law has separated you, and you should obey the law. You should not even eat his bread now, because—because—— Oh, Hester, you understand."

"I do understand," she said, rising to her feet in her energy, "and I will eat his bread though it be hard, and I will drink of his cup though it be bitter. His bread and his cup shall be mine, and none other shall be mine. I do understand. I know that these wicked people have blasted my life. I know that I can be nothing to him now. But his child shall never be made to think that his mother had condemned his father. Yes, Margaret," she said again, "I do love you, and I do trust you, and I know that you love me. But you do not love him. You do not believe in him. If they came to you and took Robert away, would you go and live with other people? I do love papa and mamma.

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But this is his house, and he bids me stay here. The very clothes which I wear are his clothes. I am his; and though they were to cut me apart from him, still I should belong to him. No,—I will not go to mamma. Of course I have forgiven her, because she meant it for the best; but I will never go back to Chesterton."

Then there came letters from the mother, one letter hot upon the other, all appealing to those texts in Scripture by which the laws of nations are supposed to be supported. "Give unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's." It was for the law to declare who were and who were not man and wife, and in this matter the law had declared. After this how could she doubt? Or how could she hesitate as to tearing herself away from the belongings of the man who certainly was not her husband? And there were dreadful words in these letters which added much to the agony of her who received them—words which were used in order that their strength might prevail. But they had no strength to convert, though they had strength to afflict. Then Mrs. Bolton, who in her anxiety was ready to submit herself to any personal discomfort, prepared to go to Folking. But Hester sent back word that, in her present condition, she would see nobody,—not even her mother.

But it was not only from the family of the Boltons that these applications and entreaties came. Even Mr. Seely took upon himself to tell Mr. Caldigate that under existing circumstances Hester should not be detained at Folking.

"I do not know that either she or I want advice in the matter," Mr. Caldigate replied. But as a stone will be worn hollow in time by the droppings of many waters, so was it thought that if all Cambridge would continue firm in its purpose, then this stone might at

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last be made to yield. The world was so anxious that it resolved among itself that it would submit to any amount of snubbing in carrying out its object. Even the mayor wrote. "Dear Mr. Caldigate, greatly as I object to all interference in families, I think myself bound to appeal to you as to the unfortunate condition of that young lady from Chesterton." Then followed all the arguments, and some of the texts,—both of which were gradually becoming hackneyed in the matter. Mr. Caldigate's answer to this was very characteristic: "Dear Mr. Mayor, if you have an objection to interfere in families, why do you do it?" The mayor took the rebuke with placid good-humour, feeling that his little drop might also have done something towards hollowing the stone.

But of all the counsellors, perhaps Mr. Smirkie was the most zealous and the most trusting. He felt himself to be bound in a peculiar manner to Folking,—by double ties. Was not the clergyman of the parish the brother of his dear departed one? And with whom better could he hold sweet counsel? And then that second dear one, who had just been vouchsafed to him, —had she not as it were by a miracle been rescued from the fate into which the other poor lady had fallen, and obtained her present thoroughly satisfactory position? Mr. Smirkie was a clergyman who understood it to be his duty to be urgent for the good cause, in season and out of season, and who always did his duty. So he travelled over to Utterden and discussed the matter at great length with Mr. Bromley. "I do believe in my heart," said Mr. Bromley, "that the verdict is wrong." But Mr. Smirkie, with much eloquence, averred that that had nothing to do with the question. Mr. Bromley opened his eyes very wide. "Nothing at

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all," said Mr. Smirkie. "It is the verdict of the jury confirmed by the judge, and the verdict itself dissolves the marriage. Whether the verdict be wrong or right, that marriage ceremony is null and void. They are not man and wife;—not now, even if they ever were. Of course you are aware of that."

Mr. Smirkie was altogether wrong in his law. Such men generally are. Mr. Bromley in vain endeavoured to point out to him that the verdict could have no such power as was here claimed for it, and that if any claim was to be brought up hereafter as to the legitimacy of the child, the fact of the verdict could only be used as evidence, and that that evidence would or would not be regarded as true by another jury, according to the views which that other jury might take. Mr. Smirkie would only repeat his statements with increased solemnity,—"That marriage is no marriage. That poor lady is not Mrs. John Caldigate. She is Miss Hester Bolton, and, therefore, every breath of air which she draws under that roof is a sin." As he said this out upon the dike side, he looked about him with manifest regret that he had no other audience than his brother-in-law.

And at last, after much persevering assiduity, Mr. Smirkie succeeded in reaching Mr. Caldigate himself, and expressed himself with boldness. He was a man who had at any rate the courage of his opinions. "You have to think of her future life in this world and in the next," he said. "And in the next," he repeated with emphasis, when Mr. Caldigate paused.

"As to what will affect her happiness in this world, sir," said the old man very gravely, "I think you can hardly be a judge."

"Good repute," suggested the clergyman.

"Has she done anything that ought to lessen the fair

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fame of a woman in the estimation of other women? And as to the next world, in the rewards and punishments of which you presume it to be your peculiar duty to deal, has she done anything which you think will subject her to the special wrath of an offended Deity?" This question he asked with a vehemence of voice which astounded his companion. "She has loved her husband with a peculiar love," he continued. "She has believed herself to be joined to him by ties which you shall call romantic, if you will,—superstitious, if you will."

"I hope not,—I hope not," said Mr. Smirkie, holding up both his hands, not at all understanding the old man's meaning, but intending to express horror at "supersition," which he supposed to be a peculiar attribute of the Roman Catholic branch of the Christian Church. "Not that I hope."

"I cannot fathom, and you, apparently, cannot at all understand, her idea of the sanctity of the marriage vow. But if you knew anything about her, I think you would refrain from threatening her with divine wrath; and as you know nothing about her, I regard such threats, coming from you, as impertinent, unmanly, inhuman, and blasphemous." Mr. Caldigate had commenced this conversation, though vehemently, still in so argumentative a manner, and in his allusions to the lady's romantic and superstitious ideas had seemed to yield so much, that the terrible vigour of his last words struck the poor clergyman almost to the ground. One epithet came out after another, very clearly spoken, with a pause between each of them; and the speaker, as he uttered them, looked his victim close in the face. Then he walked slowly away, leaving Mr. Smirkie fixed to the ground. What had he done? He had simply made a gentle allusion to the next world, as,

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surely, it was his duty to do. Whether this old pagan did or did not believe in a next world himself, he must at any rate be aware that it is the peculiar business of a clergyman to make such references. As to "impertinent" and "unmanly," he would let them go by. He was, he conceived, bound by his calling to be what people called impertinent, and manliness had nothing to do with him. But "inhuman" and "blasphemous!" Why had he come all the way over from Plum-cum-Pippins, at considerable personal expense, except in furtherance of that highest humanity which concerns itself with eternity? And as for blasphemy, it might, he thought, as well be said that he was blasphemous whenever he read the Bible aloud to his flock! His first idea was to write an exhaustive letter on the subject to Mr. Caldigate, in which he would invite that gentleman to recall the offensive words. But as he drove his gig into the parsonage yard at Plum-cum-Pippins, he made up his mind that this, too, was among the things which a Christian minister should bear with patience.

But the dropping water always does hollow the stone,—hollow it a little though the impression may not be visible to the naked eye. Even when rising in his wrath, Mr. Caldigate had crushed the clergyman by the violence of his language,—having been excited to anger chiefly by the thick-headedness of the man in not having understood the rebuke intended to be conveyed by his earlier and gentler words,—even when leaving the man, with a full conviction that the man was crushed, the old Squire was aware that he, the stone, was being gradually hollowed. Hester was now very dear to him. From the first she had suited his ideas of a wife for his son. And her constancy in her misery

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had wound itself into his heart. He quite understood that her welfare should now be his great care. There was no one else from whom she would listen to a word of advice. From her husband, whose slightest word would have been a law to her, no word could now come. From her own family she was entirely estranged, having been taught to regard them simply as enemies in this matter. She loved her mother; but in this matter her mother was her declared enemy. His voice, and his voice alone, could now reach her ears. As to that great hereafter to which the clergyman had so flippantly alluded, he was content to leave that to herself. Much as he differed from her as to details of a creed, he felt sure that she was safe there. To his thinking, she was the purest human being that had ever come beneath his notice. Whatever portion of bliss there may be for mankind in a life after this life, the fullest portion of that bliss would be hers, whether by reason of her creed or in spite of it. Accustomed to think much of things, it was thus that he thought of her in reference to the world to come. But as to this world, he was not quite so sure. If she could die and have that other bliss at once, that would be best,—only for the child, only for the child! But he did doubt. Would it do for her to ignore that verdict altogether, when his son should be released from jail, and be to him as though there had been no verdict? Would not the finger of scorn be pointed at her;—and, as he thought of it,—possibly at future children? Might it not be better for her to bow to the cruelty of Fate, and consent to be apart from him at any rate while that woman should be alive? And again, if such would be better, then was it not clear that no time should be lost in beginning that new life? If at last it should be ruled

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that she must go back to her mother, it would certainly be well that she should do so now, at once, so that people might know that she had yielded to the verdict. In this way the stone was hollowed,—though the hollowing had not been made visible to the naked eye of Mr. Smirkie.

He was a man whose conscience did not easily let him rest when he believed that a duty was incumbent on him. It was his duty now, he thought, not to bid her go, nor to advise her to go,—but to put before her what reasons there might be for her going.

"I am telling you," he said, "what other people say."

"I do not regard what other people say."

"That might be possible for a man, Hester, but a woman has to regard what the world says. You are young, and may have a long life before you. We cannot hide from ourselves the fact that a most terrible misfortune has fallen upon you, altogether undeserved, but very grievous."

"God, when he gave me my husband," she replied, "did me more good than any man can do me harm by taking him away. I never cease to tell myself that the blessing is greater than the misfortune."

"But, my dearest——"

"I know it all, father. I know what you would tell me. If I live here after he comes out of prison people will say that I am his mistress."

"Not that, not that," he cried, unable to bear the contumely of the word, even from her lips.

"Yes, father; that is what you mean. That is what they all mean. That is what mamma means, and Margaret. Let them call me what they will. It is not what they call me, but what I am. It is bad for a woman to have evil said of her, but it is worse for her to do

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evil. It is your house, and you, of course, can bid me go."

"I will never do that."

"But unless I am turned out homeless on to the roads, I will stay here where he left me. I have only one sure way of doing right, and that is to obey him as closely as I can. He cannot order me now, but he has left his orders. He has told me to remain under his roof, and to call myself by his name, and in no way to derogate from my own honour as his wife. By God's help I will do as he bids me. Nothing that any of them can say shall turn me an inch from the way he has pointed out. You are good to me."

"I will try to be good to you."

"You are so good to me that I can hardly understand your goodness. Trusting to that, I will wait here till he shall come again and tell me where and how I am to live."

After that the old Squire made no further attempt in the same direction, finding that no slightest hollow had been made on that other stone.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE BOLTONS ARE MUCH TROUBLED

THE condition of the inhabitants of Puritan Grange during the six weeks immediately after the verdict was very sad indeed. I have described badly the character of the lady living there, if I have induced my readers to think that her heart was hardened against her daughter. She was a woman of strong convictions and bitter prejudices; but her heart was soft enough. When she married, circumstances had separated her widely from her own family, in which she had never known either a brother or a sister; and the burden of her marriage with an old man had been brightened to her by the possession of an only child,—of one daughter, who had been the lamp of her life, the solitary delight of her heart, the single relief to the otherwise solitary tedium of her monotonous existence. She had, indeed, attended to the religious training of her girl with constant care;—but the yearnings of her maternal heart had softened even her religion, so that the laws, and dogmas, and texts, and exercises by which her husband was oppressed, and her servants afflicted, had been made lighter for Hester,—sometimes not without pangs of conscience on the part of the self-convicted parent. She had known, as well as other mothers, how to gloat over the sweet charms of the one thing which in all the world had been quite her own. She had revelled in kisses and soft touches. Her Hester's garments had

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been a delight to her, till she had taught herself to think that though sackcloth and ashes were the proper wear for herself and her husband, nothing was too soft, too silken, too delicate for her little girl. The roses in the garden, and the goldfish in the bowl, and the pet spaniel, had been there because such surroundings had been needed for the joyousness of her girl. And the theological hardness of the literature of the house had been somewhat mitigated as Hester grew into reading, so that Watt was occasionally relieved by Wordsworth, and Thomson's "Seasons" was alternated with George Wither's "Hallelujah."

Then had come, first the idea of the marriage, and, immediately consequent upon the idea, the marriage itself. The story of that has been told, but the reader has perhaps hardly been made to understand the utter bereavement which it brought on the mother. It is natural that the adult bird should delight to leave the family nest, and that the mother bird should have its heart-strings torn by the separation. It must be so, alas! even when the divulsions are made in the happiest manner. But here the tearing away had nothing in it to reconcile the mother. She was suddenly told that her daughter was to be no longer her own. Her stepson had interfered, and her husband had become powerful over her with a sudden obstinacy. She had had no hand in the choice. She would fain have postponed any choice, and would then fain have herself made the choice. But a man was brought who was distasteful to her at all points, and she was told that that man was to have her daughter! He was thoroughly distasteful! He had been a spendthrift and a gambler; —then a seeker after gold in wild, godless countries, and, to her thinking, not at all the better because he

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had been a successful seeker. She believed the man to be an atheist. She was told that his father was an infidel, and was ready to believe the worst of the son. And yet in this terrible emergency she was powerless. The girl was allowed to see the man, and declared almost at once that she would transfer herself from her mother's keeping to the keeping of this wicked one! She was transferred, and the mother had been left alone.

Then came the blow,—very quickly, the blow which, as she now told herself morning, noon, and night, was no worse than she had expected. Another woman claimed the man as her husband, and so claimed him that the world all round her had declared that the claim would be made good. And the man himself had owned enough to make him unfit,—as she thought,—to have the custody of any honest woman. Then she acknowledged to herself the full weight of the misfortune that had fallen upon them,—the misfortune which never would have fallen upon them had they listened to her counsel,—and she had immediately put her shoulders to the wheel with the object of rescuing her child from the perils, from the sin, from the degradation of her position. And could she have rescued her, could she have induced her daughter to remain at Puritan Grange, there would even then have been consolation. It was one of the tenets of her life,—the strongest, perhaps, of all those doctrines on which she built her faith,—that this world is a world of woe; that wailing and suffering, if not gnashing of teeth, is and should be the condition of mankind preparatory to eternal bliss. For eternal bliss there could, as she thought, be no other preparation. She did not want to be happy here, or to have those happy around her whom she loved.

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She had stumbled and gone astray,—she told herself hourly now that she had stumbled and gone astray,—in preparing those roses and ribbons, and other lightnesses, for her young girl. It should have been all sackcloth and ashes. Had it been all sackcloth and ashes there would not have been this terrible fall. But if the loved one would now come back in sackcloth and ashes,—if she would assent to the blackness of religious asceticism, to penitence and theological gloom, and would lead the life of the godly but comfortless here in order that she might insure the glories and joys of the future life, then there might be consolation;—then it might be felt that this tribulation had been a precious balm by which an erring soul had been brought back to its due humility.

But Wordsworth and Thomson, though upon the whole moral poets, had done their work. Or, if not done altogether by them, the work had been done by the latitude which had admitted them. So that the young wife, when she found herself breathing the free air with which her husband surrounded her, was able to burst asunder the remnants of those cords of fanaticism with which her mother had endeavoured to constrain her. She looked abroad, and soon taught herself to feel that the world was bright and merry, that this mortal life was by no means necessarily a place of gloom, and the companionship of the man to whom Providence had allotted her was to her so happy, so enjoyable, so sufficient, that she found herself to have escaped from a dark prison and to be roaming among shrubs and flowers, and running waters, which were ever green, which never faded, and the music of which was always in her ears. When the first tidings of Euphemia Smith came to Folking she was in all her

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thoughts and theories of life poles asunder from her mother. There might be suffering and tribulation,—suffering even to death. But her idea of the manner in which the suffering should be endured and death awaited was altogether opposed to that which was hot within her mother's bosom.

But not the less did her mother still pray, still struggle, and still hope. They, neither of them, quite understood each other, but the mother did not at all understand the daughter. She, the mother, knew what the verdict had been, and was taught to believe that by that verdict the very ceremony of her daughter's marriage had been rendered null and void. It was in vain that the truth of the matter came to her from Robert Bolton, diluted through the vague explanations of her husband. "It does not alter the marriage, Robert says." So it was that the old man told his tale, not perfectly understanding, not even quite believing, what his son had told him.

"How can he dare to say so?" demanded the indignant mother of the injured woman. "Not alter the marriage when the jury have declared that the other woman is his wife! In the eyes of God she is not his wife. That cannot be imputed as sin to her,—not that,—because she did it not knowing. She, poor innocent, was betrayed. But now that she knows it, every mouthful that she eats of his bread is a sin."

"It is the old man's bread," said this older man, weakly.

"What matter? It is the bread of adultery." It may certainly be said that at this time Mrs. Bolton herself would have been relieved from none of her sufferings by any new evidence which would have shown that Crinkett and the others had sworn falsely.

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Though she loved her daughter dearly, though her daughter's misery made her miserable, yet she did not wish to restore the husband to the wife. Any allusion to a possibility that the verdict had been a mistaken verdict was distasteful to her. Her own original opinion respecting Caldigate had been made good by the verdict. The verdict had proved her to be right, and her husband with all his sons to have been wrong. The triumph had been very dark to her; but still it had been a triumph. It was to her an established fact that John Caldigate was not her daughter's husband; and therefore she was anxious, not to rehabilitate her daughter's position, but to receive her own miserable child once more beneath the shelter of her own wing. That they two might pray together, struggle together, together wear their sackcloth and ashes, and together console themselves with their hopes of eternal joys, while they shuddered, not altogether uncomfortably, at the torments prepared for others,—this was now the only outlook in which she could find a gleam of satisfaction; and she was so assured of the reasonableness of her wishes, so convinced that the house of her parents was now the only house in which Hester could live without running counter to the precepts of her own religion, and counter also to the rules of the wicked outside world, that she could not bring herself to believe but that she would succeed at last. Merely to ask her child to come, to repeat the invitation, and then to take a refusal, was by no means sufficient for her energy. She had failed grievously when she had endeavoured to make her daughter a prisoner at the Grange. After such an attempt as that, it could hardly be thought that ordinary invitations would be efficacious. But when that attempt had been made, it was possible

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that Hester should justify herself by the law. According to law she had then been Caldigate's wife. There had been some ground for her to stand upon as a wife, and as a wife she had stood upon it very firmly. But now there was not an inch of ground. The man had been convicted as a bigamist, and the other woman, the first woman, had been proved to be his wife. Mrs. Bolton had got it into her head that the two had been dissevered as though by some supernal power; and no explanation to the contrary, brought to her by her husband from Robert, had any power of shaking her conviction. It was manifest to all men and to all women, that she who had been seduced, betrayed, and sacrificed should now return with her innocent babe to the protection of her father's roof; and no stone must be left unturned till the unfortunate one had been made to understand her duty.

The old banker in these days had not a good time, nor, indeed, had the Boltons generally. Mrs. Bolton, though prone to grasp at power on every side, was apt, like some other women who are equally grasping, to expect almost omnipotence from the men around her when she was desirous that something should be done by them in accordance with her own bidding. Knowing her husband to be weak from age and sorrow, she could still jeer at him because he was not abnormally strong; and though her intercourse with his sons and their families was now scanty and infrequent, still by a word here and a line there she could make her reproaches felt by them all. Robert, who saw his father every day, heard very much of them. Daniel was often stung, and even Nicholas. And the reproaches reached as far as William, the barrister, up in London.

"I am sure I don't know what we can do," said the

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miserable father, sitting huddled up in his armchair one evening towards the end of August. It was very hot, but the windows were closed because he could not bear a draught, and he was somewhat impatiently waiting for the hour of prayers which were antecedent to bed, where he could be silent even if he could not sleep.

"There are five of you. One should be at the house every day to tell her of her duty."

"I couldn't go."

"They could go,—if they cared. If they cared they would go. They are her brothers."

"Mr. Caldigate would not let them enter the house," said the old man.

"Do you mean that he would separate her from her brother and her parents?"

"Not if she wished to see them. She is her own mistress, and he will abet her in whatever she may choose to do. That is what Robert says."

"And what Robert says is to be law?"

"He knows what he is talking about." Mr. Bolton as he said this shook his head angrily, because he was fatigued.

"And he is to be your guide even when your daughter's soul is in jeopardy?" This was the line of argument in reference to which Mr. Bolton always felt himself to be as weak as water before his wife. He did not dare to rebel against her religious supremacy, not simply because he was a weak old man in presence of a strong woman, but from fear of denunciation. He, too, believed her creed, though he was made miserable by her constant adherence to it. He believed, and would fain have let that suffice. She believed, and endeavoured to live up to her belief.

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And so it came to pass that when she spoke to him of his own soul, of the souls of those who were dear to him, or even of souls in general, he was frightened and paralysed. He had more than once attempted to reply with worldly arguments, but had suffered so much in the encounter that he had learned to abstain. "I cannot believe that she would refuse to see us. I shall go myself; but if we all went we should surely persuade her." In answer to this the poor man only groaned, till the coming in of the old servant to arrange the chairs and put the big Bible on the table relieved him from something of his misery.

"I certainly will not interfere," Robert Bolton said to his father on the next morning. "I will not go to Folking, because I am sure that I should do no good. Hester, no doubt, would be better at your house,—much better. There is nothing I would not do to get her back from the Caldigates altogether,—if there was a chance of success. But we have no power;—none whatever."

"No power at all," said the banker, shaking his head, and feeling some satisfaction at the possession of an intelligible word which he could quote to his wife.

"She is controller of her own actions as completely as are you and I. We have already seen how inefficacious with her are all attempts at persuasion. And she knows her position. If he were out of prison tomorrow he would be her husband."

"But he has another wife."

"Of that the civil law knows nothing. If money were coming to her he could claim it, and the verdict against him would only be evidence, to be taken for what it is worth. It would have been all very well had she wished to sever herself from him; but as she is

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determined not to do so, any interference would be useless." The question as to the marriage or no marriage was not made quite clear to the banker's mind, but he did understand that neither he, nor his wife, nor his sons had "any power," and of that argument he was determined to make use.

William, the barrister in London, was induced to write a letter, a very lengthy and elaborate epistle having come from Mrs. Bolton to his wife, in which the religious duty of all the Boltons was set forth in strong language, and in which he was incited to do something. It was almost the first letter which Mrs. William Bolton had ever received from her stepmother, whatever trifling correspondence there might have been between them having been of no consequence. They, too, felt that it would be better that Hester should return to her old home, but felt also that they had no power. "Of course, she won't," said Mrs. William.

"She has a will of her own," said the barrister.

"Why should she? Think of the gloom of that home at Chesterton, and her absolute independence at Folking. No doubt it would be better. The position is so frightful that even the gloom would be better. But she won't. We all know that."

The barrister, however, feeling that it would be better, thought that he should perform his duty by expressing his opinion, and wrote a letter to Hester, which was intended to be if possible persuasive;—and this was the answer:

"DEAR WILLIAM,—If you were carried away to prison on some horrible false accusation, would Fanny go away from you, and desert your house and your affairs, and return to her parents? You ask her, and

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ask her whether she would believe anything that anybody could say against you. If they told her that her children were nameless, would she agree to make them so by giving up your name? Wouldn't she cling to you the more, the more all the world was against you?" ["I would," said Fanny, with tearful energy. "Fanny" was, of course, Mrs. William Bolton, and was the happy mother of five nearly grown-up sons and daughters, and certainly stood in no peril as to her own or their possession of the name of Bolton. The letter was being read aloud to her by her husband, whose mind was also stirred in his sister's favour by the nature of the arguments used.] "If so," continued the writer, "why shouldn't I be the same? I don't believe a word the people said. I am sure I am his wife. And as, when he was taken away from me, he left a house for his wife and child to live in, I shall continue to live in it.

"All the same, I know you mean to be good to me. Give my best love to Fanny, and believe me, your affectionate sister,

"HESTER CALDIGATE."

In every letter and stroke of the name as she wrote it there was an assertion that she claimed it as her own, and that she was not ashamed of it.

"Upon my word," said Mrs. William Bolton, through her tears, "I am beginning to think that she is almost right." There was so much of conjugal proper feeling in this that the husband could only kiss his wife and leave her without further argument on the matter.

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CHAPTER XIV

BURNING WORDS

"No power at all; none whatever," the banker said, when he was next compelled to carry on the conversation. This was immediately upon his return home from Cambridge, for his wife never allowed the subject to be forgotten or set aside. Every afternoon and every evening it was being discussed at all hours not devoted to prayers, and every morning it was renewed at the breakfast-table.

"That comes from Robert." Mr. Bolton was not able to deny the assertion. "What does he mean by 'no power'?"

"We can't make her do it. The magistrates can't interfere."

"Magistrates! Has it been by the interference of magistrates that men have succeeded in doing great things? Was it by order from the magistrates that the lessons of Christ have been taught over all the world? Is there no such thing as persuasion? Has truth no power? Is she more deaf to argument and eloquence than another?"

"She is very deaf, I think," said the father, doubting his own eloquence.

"It is because no one has endeavoured to awaken her by burning words to a true sense of her situation." When she said this she must surely have forgotten

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much that had occurred during those weary hours which had been passed by her and her daughter outside there in the hall. "No power!" she repeated. "It is the answer always made by those who are too sleepy to do the Lord's work. It was because men said that they had no power that the grain fell upon the stony places, where they had not much earth. It is that aversion to face difficulties which causes the broad path to be crowded with victims. I, at any rate, will go. I may have no power, but I will make the attempt."

Soon after that she did make the attempt. Mr. Bolton, though he was assured by Robert that such an attempt would produce no result, could not interfere to prevent it. Had he been far stronger than he was in his own house, he could hardly have forbidden the mother to visit the daughter. Hester had sent word to say that she did not wish to see even her mother. But this had been immediately after the verdict, when she was crushed and almost annihilated by her misery. Some weeks had now passed by, and it could not be that she would refuse to admit the visitor, when such a visitor knocked at her door. They had loved each other as mothers and daughters do love when there is no rival in the affection,—when each has no one else to love. There never had been a more obedient child, or a more loving parent. Much, no doubt, had happened since to estrange the daughter from the mother. A husband had been given to her who was more to her than any parent,—as a husband should be. And then there had been that terrible opposition, that struggle, that battle in the hall. But the mother's love had never waned because of that. She was sure that her child would not refuse to see her.

So the fly was ordered to take her out to Folking,

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and on the morning fixed she dressed herself in her blackest black. She always wore brown or black,—brown being the colour suitable for the sober and sad domesticities of her week-days, which on ceremonies and Sabbath was changed for a more solemn black. But in her wardrobe there were two such gowns, one of which was apparently blacker than the other, nearer to a guise of widowhood,—more fit, at any rate, for general funereal obsequies. There are women who seem always to be burying someone; and Mrs. Bolton, as she went forth to visit her daughter, was fit to bury anyone short of her husband.

It was a hot day in August, and the fly travelled along the dusty road very slowly. She had intended to reach Folking at twelve, so that her interview might be over and that she might return without the need of eating. There is always some idea of festivity connected with food eaten at a friend's table, and she did not wish to be festive. She was, too, most unwilling to partake of John Caldigate's bread. But she did not reach the house till one, and when she knocked at the door Hester's modest lunch was about to be put upon the table.

There was considerable confusion when the servant saw Mrs. Bolton standing in the doorway. It was quite understood by everyone at Folking that for the present there was to be no intercourse between the Boltons and the Caldigates. It was understood that there should be no visitors of any kind at Folking, and it had been thought that Mr. Smirkie had forced an entrance in an impertinent manner. But yet it was not possible to send Mrs. Bolton from her own daughter's door with a mere "not at home." Of course she was shown in,—and was taken to the parlour, in which the

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lunch was prepared, while word was taken up to Hester announcing that her mother was there.

Mr. Caldigate was in the house,—in his own book-room, as it used to be called,—and Hester went to him first. "Mamma is here,—in the dining-room."

"Your mother!"

"I long to see mamma."

"Of course you do."

"But she will want me to go away with her."

"She cannot take you unless you choose to go."

"But she will speak of nothing else. I know it. I wish she had not come."

"Surely, Hester, you can make her understand that your mind is made up."

"Yes, I shall do that. I must do that. But, father, it will be very painful. You do not know what things she can say. It nearly killed me when I was at the Grange. You will not see her, I suppose?"

"If you wish it, I will. She will not care to see me; and as things are at present, what room is there for friendship?"

"You will come if I send for you?"

"Certainly. If you send for me I will come at once."

Then she crept slowly out of the room, and very slowly and very silently made her way to the parlour-door. Though she was of a strong nature, unusually strong of heart and fixed of purpose, now her heart misgave her. That terrible struggle, with all its incidents of weariness and agony, was present to her mind. Her mother could not turn the lock on her now; but, as she had said, it would be very dreadful. Her mother would say words to her which would go through her like swords. Then she opened the door, and for a moment there was the sweetness of an embrace. There was a

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prolonged tenderness in the kiss which, even to Mrs. Bolton, had a charm for the moment to soften her spirit. "Oh, mamma; my own mamma!"

"My child!"

"Yes, mamma;—every day when I pray for you I tell myself that I am still your child,—I do."

"My only one! my only one!—all that I have!" Then again they were in each other's arms. Yet, when they had last met, one had been the jailer, and the other the prisoner; and they had fought it out between them with a determined obstinacy which at moments had almost amounted to hatred. But now the very memory of these sad hours increased their tenderness. "Hester, through it all, do you not know that my heart yearns for you day and night?—that in my prayers I am always remembering you? that my dreams are happy because you are with me? that I am ever longing for you as Ruth longed for Naomi? I am as Rachel weeping for her children, who would not be comforted because they are not. Day and night my heart-strings are torn asunder because my eyes behold you not."

It was true,—and the daughter knew it to be true. But what could be done? There had grown up something for her, holier, greater, more absorbing even than a mother's love. Happily for most young wives, though the new tie may surmount the old one, it does not crush it or smother it. The mother retains a diminished hold, and knowing what nature has intended, is content. She, too, with some subsidiary worship, kneels at the new altar, and all is well. But here, though there was abundant love, there was no sympathy. The cause of discord was ever present to them both. Unless John Caldigate was acknowledged to be a fitting husband, not even the mother could be received with a

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full welcome. And unless John Caldigate were repudiated, not even the daughter could be accepted as altogether pure. Parental and filial feelings sufficed for nothing between them beyond the ecstasy of a caress.

As Hester was standing mute, still holding her mother's hand, the servant came to the door, and asked whether she would have her lunch.

"You will stay and eat with me, mamma? But you will come up to my room first?"

"I will go up to your room, Hester."

"Then we will have our lunch," Hester said turning to the servant. So the two went together to the upper chamber, and in a moment the mother had fetched her baby, and placed it in her mother's arms.

"I wish he were at the Grange," said Mrs. Bolton. Then Hester shook her head; but feeling the security of her position, left the baby with its grandmother. "I wish he were at the Grange. It is the only fitting home for him at present."

"No, mamma; that cannot be."

"It should be so, Hester. It should be so."

"Pray do not speak of it, dear mamma."

"Have I not come here on purpose that I might speak of it? Sweet as it is to me to have you in my arms, do you not know that I have come for that purpose,—for that only?"

"It cannot be so."

"I will not take such an answer, Hester. I am not here to speak of pleasure or delights,—not to speak of sweet companionship, or even of a return to that more godly life which, I think, you would find in your father's house. Had not this ruin come, unhappy though I might have been, and distrustful, I should not

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have interfered. Those whom God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

"It is what I say to myself every hour. God has joined us, and no man, no number of men, shall put us asunder."

"But, my own darling,—God has not joined you! When he pretended to be joined to you, he had a wife then living,—still living."

"No."

"Will you set up your own opinion against evidence which the jury has believed, which the judge has believed, which all the world has believed?"

"Yes, I will," said Hester, the whole nature of whose face was now altered, and who looked as she did when sitting in the hall-chair at Puritan Grange,—"I will. Though I were almost to know that he had been false, I should still believe him to be true."

"I cannot understand that, Hester."

"But I know him to be true,—quite true," she said, wishing to erase the feeling which her unguarded admission had made. "Not to believe him to have been true would be death to me; and for my boy's sake, I would wish to live. But I have no doubt, and I will listen to no one,—not even to you, when you tell me that God did not join us together."

"You cannot go behind the law, Hester. As a citizen, you must obey the law."

"I will live here,—as a citizen,—till he has been restored to me."

"But he will not then be your husband. People will not call you by his name. He cannot have two wives. She will be his wife. Oh, Hester, have you thought of it?"

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"I have thought of it," she said, raising her face, looking upwards through the open window, out away towards the heavens, and pressing her foot firmly upon the floor. "I have thought of it,—very much; and I have asked—the Lord—for counsel. And He has given it me. He has told me what to believe, what to know, and how to live. I will never again lie with my head upon his bosom unless all that be altered. But I will serve him as his wife, and obey him; and if I can I will comfort him. I will never desert him. And not all the laws that were ever made, nor all the judges that ever sat in judgment, shall make me call myself by another name than his."

The mother had come there to speak burning words, and she had in some sort prepared them; but now she found herself almost silenced by the energy of her daughter. And when her girl told her that she had applied to her God for counsel, and that the Lord had answered her prayers—that the Lord had directed her as to her future life,—then the mother hardly knew how to mount to higher ground, so as to seem to speak from a more exalted eminence. And yet she was not at all convinced. That the Lord should give bad counsel she knew to be impossible. That the Lord would certainly give good counsel to such a suppliant, if asked aright, she was quite sure. But they who send others to the throne of heaven for direct advice are apt to think that the asking will not be done aright unless it be done with their spirit and their bias,—with the spirit and bias which they feel when they recommend the operation. No one has ever thought that direct advice from the Lord was sufficient authority for the doing of that of which he himself disapproved. It was Mrs. Bolton's daily custom to kneel herself and ask for such

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counsel, and to enjoin such asking upon all those who were subject to her influence. But had she been assured by some young lady to whom she had recommended the practice that heavenly warrant had thus been secured for balls and theatres, she would not have scrupled to declare that the Lord had certainly not been asked aright. She was equally certain of some defalcation now. She did not doubt that Hester had done as she had said. That the prayer had been put up with energetic fervour, she was sure. But energetic fervour in prayer was, she thought, of no use,—nay, was likely to be most dangerous, when used in furtherance of human prepossessions and desires. Had Hester said her prayers with a proper feeling of self-negation,—in that religious spirit which teaches the poor mortal here on earth to know that darkness and gloom are safer than mirth and comfort,—then the Lord would have told her to leave Folking, to go back to Puritan Grange, and to consent once more to be called Hester Bolton. This other counsel had not come from the Lord,—had come only from Hester's own polluted heart. But she was not at the moment armed with words sufficiently strong to explain all this.

"Hester," she said, "does not all this mean that your own proud spirit is to have a stronger dominion over you than the experience and wisdom of all your friends?"

"Perhaps it does. But, at any rate, my proud spirit will retain its pride."

"You will be obstinate?"

"Certainly I will. Nothing on earth shall make me leave this house till I am told by its owner to go."

"Who is its owner? Old Mr. Caldigate is its owner."

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"I hardly know. Though John has explained it again and again, I am so bad at such things that I am not sure. But I can do what I please with it. I am the mistress here. As you say that the Grange is your house, I can say that this is mine. It is the abode appointed for me, and here I will abide."

"Then, Hester, I can only tell you that you are sinning. It is a heavy, grievous, and most obvious sin."

"Dear mother,—dear mamma; I knew how it would be if you came. It is useless for me to say more. Were I to go away, that to me would be the sin. Why should we discuss it any more? There comes a time to all of us when we must act on our own responsibility. My husband is in prison, and cannot personally direct me. No doubt I could go, were I so pleased. His father would not hinder me, though he is most unwilling that I should go. I must judge a little for myself. But I have his judgment to fall back upon. He told me to stay, and I shall stay."

Then there was a pause, during which Mrs. Bolton was thinking of her burning words,—was remembering the scorn with which she had treated her husband when he told her that they had "no power." She had endeavoured herself not to be sleepy in doing the Lord's work. But her seed, too, had fallen upon stony places. She was powerless to do, or even to say, anything further. "Then I may go," she muttered.

"You will come and eat with me, mamma?"

"No, my dear,—no."

"You do not wish that there should be a quarrel?"

"There is very much, Hester, that I do not wish. I have long ceased to trust much to any wishes. There

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is a great gulf between us, and I will not attempt to bridge it by the hollow pretence of sitting at table with you. I will still pray that you may be restored to me." Then she went to the door.

"Mamma, you will kiss me before you go?"

"I will cover you with kisses when you return to your own home." But in spite of this, Hester went down with her into the hall, holding by her raiment; and as Mrs. Bolton got into the fly, she did succeed in kissing her mother's hand.

"She has gone," said Hester, going to her father-in-law's room. "Though I was so glad to see her, I wish she had not come. When people think so very, very differently on a matter which is so very, very important, it is better that they should not meet, let them love each other ever so."

As far as Hester and Mr. Caldigate were concerned, the visit had in truth been made without much inconvenience. There had been no absolute violence,—no repetition of such outward quarrelling as had made those two days at the Grange so memorable. There was almost a feeling of relief in Hester's bosom when her mother was driven away after that successful grasp at the parting hand. Though they had differed much, they had not hated each other during that last half-hour. Hester had been charged with sin;—which, however, had been a matter of course. But in Mrs. Bolton's heart there was a feeling which made her return home very uncomfortable. Having twitted her husband with his lack of power, she had been altogether powerless herself; and now she was driven to confess to herself that no further step could be taken. "She is obstinate," she said to her husband,—"stiff-necked in her sin, as

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are all determined sinners. I can say no more to her. It may be that the Lord will soften her heart when her sorrows have endured yet for a time." But she said no more of burning words, or of eloquence, or of the slackness of the work of those who work as though they were not in earnest.

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CHAPTER XV

CURLYDOWN AND BAGWAX

THERE had been a sort of pledge given at the trial by Sir John Joram that the matter of the envelope should be further investigated. He had complained in his defence that the trial had been hurried on,—that time had not been allowed for full inquiries, seeing that the character of the deed by which his client had been put in jeopardy depended upon what had been done on the other side of the globe. "This crime," he said, "if it be a crime, was no doubt committed in the parish church at Utterden in the early part of last year; but all the evidence which has been used or which could be used to prove it to have been a crime, has reference to things done long ago, and far away. Time has not been allowed us for rebutting this evidence by counter-evidence." And yet much time had been allowed. The trial had been postponed from the spring to the summer Assizes; and then the offence was one which, from its very nature, required speedy notice. The Boltons, who became the instigators of the prosecution, demanded that the ill-used woman should be relieved as quickly as possible from her degradation. There had been a general feeling that the trial should not be thrown over to another year; and, as we are aware, it had been brought to judgment, and the convicted criminal was in jail. But Sir John still persevered, and to this perseverance

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he had been instigated very much by a certain clerk in the post-office.

Two post-office clerks had been used as witnesses at the trial, of whom the elder, Mr. Curlydown, had been by no means a constant or an energetic witness. A witness, when he is brought up for the defence, should not be too scrupulous, or he will be worse than useless. In a matter of fact a man can only say what he saw, or tell what he heard, or declare what he knew. He should at least do no more. Though it be to save his father, he should not commit perjury. But when it comes to opinion, if a man allows himself to waver, he will be taken as thinking the very opposite of what he does think. Such had been the case with Mr. Curlydown. He had intended to be very correct. He had believed that the impression of the Sydney stamp was on the whole adverse to the idea that it had been obtained in the proper way; and yet he had, when cross-examined, acknowledged that it might very probably have been obtained in the proper way. It certainly had not been "smudged" at all, and such impressions generally did become "smudged." But then he was made to say also that impressions very often did not become smudged. And as to the word "Nobble" which should have been stamped upon the envelope, he thought that in such a case its absence was very suspicious; but still he was brought to acknowledge that post-masters in provincial offices far away from inspection, frequently omit that part of their duty. All this had tended to rob the envelope of those attributes of deceit and conspiracy which Sir John Joram attributed to it, and had justified the judge in his opinion that Mr. Curlydown's evidence had told them little or nothing. But even Mr. Curlydown had found more favour with the judge than

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Samuel Bagwax, the junior of the two post-office witnesses. Samuel Bagwax had perhaps been a little too energetic. He had made the case his own, and was quite sure that the envelope had been tampered with. I think that the counsel for the Crown pressed his witness unfairly when he asked Mr. Bagwax whether he was absolutely certain that an envelope with such an impression could not have passed through the post-office in the ordinary course of business. "Nothing is impossible," Mr. Bagwax had replied. "Is it not very much within the sphere of possibility?" the learned gentleman had asked. The phrase was misleading, and Mr. Bagwax was induced to say that it might be so. But still his assurance would probably have had weight with the jury but for the overstrained honesty of his companion. The judge had admonished the jury that in reference to such a point they should use their own common sense rather than the opinion of such a man as Mr. Bagwax. A man of ordinary common sense would know how the mark made by a die on a letter would be affected by the sort of manipulation to which the letter bearing it would be subjected;—and so on. From all which it came to pass that the judge was understood to have declared that that special envelope might very well have passed in ordinary course through the Sydney post-office.

But Samuel Bagwax was not a man to be put down by the injustice of lawyers. He knew himself to have been ill-treated. He was confident that no man alive was more competent than himself to form an opinion on such a subject; and he was sure, quite sure,—perhaps a little too sure,—that there had been some dishonesty with that envelope. And thus he became a strong partisan of John Caldigate and of Mrs. John Caldigate.

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If there had been tampering with that envelope, then the whole thing was fraudulent, false, and the outcome of a base conspiracy. Many points were present to his mind which the lawyers between them would not allow him to explain properly to a jury. When had that die been cut, by which so perfect an impression had been formed? If it could be proved that it had been cut since the date it bore, then of course the envelope would be fraudulent. But it was only in Sydney that this could be ascertained. He was sure that a week's ordinary use would have made the impression less perfect. Some letters must of course be subjected to new dies, and this letter might in due course have been so subjected. But it was more probable that a new stamp should have been selected for a surreptitious purpose. All this could be ascertained by the book of daily impressions kept in the Sydney post-office;—but there had not been time to get this evidence from Sydney since this question of the impression had been ventilated. It was he who had first given importance to the envelope; and being a resolute and almost heroic man, he was determined that no injustice on the part of a Crown prosecutor, no darkness in a judge's mind, no want of intelligence in a jury, should rob him of the delight of showing how important to the world was a proper understanding of post-office details. He still thought that that envelope might be made to prove a conspiracy on the part of Crinkett and the others, and he succeeded in getting Sir John Joram to share that belief.

The envelope itself was still preserved among the sacred archives of the trial. That had not been bodily confided to Samuel Bagwax. But various photographs had been made of the document, which no doubt reproduced exactly every letter, every mark, and every line which was to be seen upon it by the closest inspection.

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There was the direction, which was admitted to be in Caldigate's handwriting, the postage-stamp, with its obliterating lines,—and the impression of the Sydney postmark. That was nearly all. The paper of the envelope had no water-marks. Bagwax thought that if he could get hold of the envelope itself something might be done even with that; but here Sir John could not go along with him, as it had been fully acknowledged that the envelope had passed from the possession of Caldigate into the hands of the woman bearing the written address. If anything could be done, it must be done by the postmarks,—and those postmarks Bagwax studied morning, noon, and night.

It had now been decided that Bagwax was to be sent out to Sydney at the expense of the Caldigates. There had been difficulty as to leave of absence for such a purpose. The man having been convicted, the postmaster-general was bound to regard him as guilty, and hesitated to allow a clerk to be absent so long on behalf of a man who was already in prison. But the Secretary of State overruled this scruple, and the leave was to be given. Bagwax was elate,—first and chiefly because he trusted that he would become the means of putting right a foul and cruel wrong. For in these days Bagwax almost wept over the hardships inflicted on that poor lady at Folking. But he was elated also by the prospect of his travels, and by the godsend of a six months' leave of absence. He was a little proud, too, at having had this personal attention paid to him by the Secretary of State. All this was very gratifying. But that which gratified him was not so charming to his brother clerks. They had never enjoyed the privilege of leaving that weary office for six months. They were not allowed to occupy themselves in contemplating an envelope. They were never specially mentioned by the

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Secretary of State. Of course there was a little envy, and a somewhat general feeling that Bagwax, having got to the weak side of Sir John Joram, was succeeding in having himself sent out as a first-class overland passenger to Sydney, merely as a job. Paris to be seen, and the tunnel, and the railways through Italy, and the Suez Canal,—all these places, not delightful to the wives of Indian officers coming home or going out, were an Elysium to the post-office mind. His expenses to be paid for six months on the most gentleman-like footing, and his salary going on all the time! Official human nature, good as it generally is, cannot learn that such glories are to be showered on one not specially deserving head without something akin to enmity. The general idea, therefore, in the office, was that Bagwax would do no good in Sydney, that others would have been better than Bagwax,—in fact, that of all the clerks in all the departments, Bagwax was the very last man who ought to have been selected for an enterprise demanding secrecy, discretion, and some judicial severity.

Curlydown and Bagwax occupied the same room at the office in St. Martin's-le-Grand; and there it was their fate in life to arrange, inspect, and generally attend to those apparently unintelligible hieroglyphics with which the outside coverings of our correspondence are generally bedaubed. Curlydown's hair had fallen from his head, and his face had become puckered with wrinkles, through anxiety to make these markings legible and intelligible. The popular newspaper, the popular member of Parliament, and the popular novelist, —the name of Charles Dickens will of course present itself to the reader who remembers the Circumlocution office,—have had it impressed on their several minds,— and have endeavoured to impress the same idea on the

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minds of the public generally,—that the normal Government clerk is quite indifferent to his work. No greater mistake was ever made, or one showing less observation of human nature. It is the nature of a man to appreciate his own work. The felon who is made simply to move shot, perishes because he knows his work is without aim. The fault lies on the other side. The policeman is ambitious of arresting everybody. The lawyer would rather make your will for you gratis than let you make your own. The General can believe in nothing but in well-trained troops. Curlydown would willingly have expended the whole net revenue of the post-office —and his own,—in improving the machinery for stamping letters. But he had hardly succeeded in life. He had done his duty, and was respected by all. He lived comfortably in a suburban cottage with a garden, having some private means, and had brought up a happy family in prosperity;—but he had done nothing new. Bagwax, who was twenty years his junior, had with manifest effects, added a happy drop of turpentine to the stamping-oil,—and in doing so had broken Curlydown's heart. The "Bagwax Stamping Mixture" had absolutely achieved a name, which was printed on the official list of stores. Curlydown's mind was vacillating between the New River and a pension,—between death in the breach and acknowledged defeat,—when a new interest was lent to his life by the Caldigate envelope. It was he who had been first sent by the Postmaster-General to Sir John Joram's chambers. But the matter had become too large for himself alone, and in an ill-fated hour Bagwax had been consulted. Now Bagwax was to be sent to Sydney,—almost with the appointments of a lawyer!

They still occupied the same room,—a fact which

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infinitely increased the torments of Curlydown's position. They ought to have been moved very far asunder. Curlydown was still engaged in the routine ordinary work of the day, seeing that the proper changes were made in all the stamps used during the various hours of the day,—assuring himself that the crosses and letters and figures upon which so much of the civilisation of Europe depended, were properly altered and arranged. And it may well be that his own labours were made heavier by the devotion of his colleagues to other matters. And yet from time to time Bagwax would ask him questions, never indeed taking his advice, but still demanding his assistance. Curlydown was not naturally a man of ill-temper or an angry heart. But there were moments in which he could hardly abstain from expressing himself with animosity.

On a certain morning in August, Bagwax was seated at his table, which as usual was laden with the envelopes of many letters. There were some hundreds before him, the marks on which he was perusing with a strong magnifying-glass. It had been arranged that he was to start on his great journey in the first week in September, and he employed his time before he went in scanning all the envelopes bearing the Sydney post-mark which he had been able to procure in England. He spent the entire day with a magnifying-glass in his hand;—but as Curlydown was also always armed in the same fashion that was not peculiar. They did much of their work with such tools.

The date on the envelope,—the date conveyed by the impression, to which so much attention had been given,—was 10th May, 1873. Bagwax had succeeded in getting covers bearing dates very close to that. The 7th of May had been among his treasures for some time,

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and now he had acquired an entire letter, envelope and all, which bore the Sydney impression of the 13th May. This was a great triumph. "I have brought it within a week," he said to Curlydown, bending down over his glass, and inspecting at the same time the two dates.

"What's the good of that?" asked Curlydown, as he passed rapidly under his own glass the stamps which it was his duty to inspect from day to day.

"All the good in the world," said Bagwax, brandishing his own magnifier with energy. "It is almost conclusive." Now the argument with Bagwax was this,—that if he found in the Sydney postmarks of 7th May, and in those of 13th May, the same deviations or bruises in the die, those deviations must have existed also on the days between these two dates;—and as the impression before him was quite perfect, without any deviation, did it not follow that it must have been obtained in some manner outside the ordinary course of business?

"There are a dozen stamps in use at the Sydney office," said Curlydown.

"Perhaps so; or, at any rate, three or four. But I can trace as well as possible the times at which new stamps were supplied. Look here." Then he threw himself over the multitude of envelopes, all of which had been carefully arranged as to dates, and began to point out the periods. "Here, you see, in 1873, there is nothing that quite tallies with the Caldigate letter. I have measured them to the twentieth part of an inch, and I am sure that early in May, '73, there was not a stamp in use in the Sydney office which could have made that impression. I have eighteen Mays, '73, and not one of them could have been made by the stamp that did this." As he spoke thus, he rapped his finger down on

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the copy of the sacred envelope, which he was using. "Is not that conclusive?"

"If it was not conclusive to keep a man from going to prison," said Curlydown, remembering the failure of his own examination, "it will not be conclusive to get him out again."

"There I differ. No doubt further evidence is necessary, and therefore I must go to Sydney."

"If it is conclusive, I don't see why you should go to Sydney at all. If your proof is so perfect, why should that fellow be kept in prison while you are running about the world?"

This idea had also occurred to Bagwax, and he had thought whether it would be possible for him to be magnanimous enough to perfect his proof in England, so as to get a pardon from the Secretary of State at once, to his own manifest injury. "What would satisfy you and me," said Bagwax, "wouldn't satisfy the ignorant." To the conductor of an omnibus on the Surrey side of the river, the man who does not know what "The Castle" means is ignorant. The outsider who is in a mist as to the "former question," or "the order of the day," is ignorant to the member of Parliament. To have no definite date conveyed by the term "Rogation Sunday" is to the clerical mind gross ignorance. The horsey man thinks you have been in bed all your life if the "near side" is not as descriptive to you as "the left hand." To Bagwax and Curlydown, not to distinguish postmarks was to be ignorant. "I fear it wouldn't satisfy the ignorant," said Bagwax, thinking of his projected journey to Sydney.

"Proof is proof," said Curlydown. "I don't think you'll ever get him out. The time has gone by. But you may do just as much here as there."

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"I'm sure we shall get him out. I'll never rest in my bed till we have got him out."

"Mr. Justice Bramber won't mind whether you rest in your bed or not,—nor yet the Secretary of State."

"Sir John Joram——" began Bagwax. In these discussions Sir John Joram was always his main staff.

"Sir John Joram has got other fish to fry before this time. It's a marvel to me, Bagwax, that they should give way to all this nonsense. If anything could be done, it could be done in half the time,—and if anything could be done, it could be done here. By the time you're back from Sydney, Caldigate's time will be half out. Why don't you let Sir John see your proof? You don't want to lose your trip, I suppose."

Caldigate was languishing in prison, and that poor, nameless lady was separated from her husband, and he had the proof lying there on the table before him,—sufficient proof, as he did in his heart believe! But how often does it fall to the lot of a post-office clerk to be taken round the world free of expense? The way Curlydown put it was ill-natured and full of envy. Bagwax was well aware that Curlydown was instigated solely by envy. But still, there were his own convictions,—and Bagwax was in truth a soft-hearted, conscientious man.

"I do think it ought to be enough for any Secretary of State," said he, "and I'll go to Sir John Joram tomorrow. Of course, I should like to see the world;—who wouldn't? But I'd rather be the means of restoring that fellow to his poor wife, than be sent to all four quarters of the globe with a guinea a-day for personal expenses." In this way he nobly made up his mind to go at once to Sir John Joram.

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CHAPTER XVI

SIR JOHN JORAM'S CHAMBERS

Mr. Curlydown's insinuations had been very cruel, but also very powerful. Bagwax, as he considered the matter that night in his bed, did conscientiously think that a discreet and humane Secretary of State would let the unfortunate husband out of prison on the evidence which he (Bagwax) had already collected. My readers will not perhaps agree with him. The finding of a jury and the sentence of a judge must be regarded seriously by Secretaries of State, and it is probable that Bagwax's theory would not make itself clear to that great functionary. A good many ifs were necessary. If the woman claiming Caldigate as her husband would swear falsely to anything in that matter, then she would swear falsely to everything. If this envelope had never passed through the Sydney post-office, then she would have sworn falsely about the letter,—and therefore her evidence would have been altogether false. If this postmark had not been made in the due course of business, and on the date as now seen, then the envelope had not passed regularly through the Sydney office. So far it was all clear to the mind of Bagwax, and almost clear that the postmark could not have been made on the date it bore. The result for which he was striving with true faith had taken such a hold of his mind, he was so adverse to the Smith-Crinkett interest, and so generously anxious for John Caldigate and the poor lady at

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Folking, that he could not sée obstacles;—he could not even clearly see the very obstacles which made his own going to Sydney seem to others to be necessary. And yet he longed to go to Sydney with all his heart. He would be almost broken-hearted if he were robbed of that delight.

In this frame of mind he packed all his envelopes carefully into a large hand-bag, and started in a cab for Sir John Joram's chambers. "Where are you going with them now?" Curlydown asked, somewhat disdainfully, just as Bagwax was starting. Curlydown had taken upon himself of late to ridicule the envelopes, and had become almost an anti-Caldigatite. Bagwax vouchsafed to make him no reply. On the previous afternoon he had declared his purpose of going at once to Sir John, and had written, as Curlydown well knew, a letter to Sir John's clerk to make an appointment. Sir John was known to be in town though it was the end of August, being a laborious man who contented himself with a little partridge-shooting by way of holiday. It had been understood that he was to see Bagwax before his departure. All this had been known to Curlydown, and the question had been asked only to exasperate. There was a sarcasm in the "now" which determined Bagwax to start without a word of reply.

As he went down to the Temple in the cab he turned over in his mind a great question which often troubles many of us. How far was he bound to sacrifice himself for the benefit of others? He had done his duty zealously in this matter, and now was under orders to continue the work in a manner which opened up to him a whole paradise of happiness. How grand was this opportunity of seeing something of the world beyond St. Martin's-le-Grand! And then the pecuniary gain

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would be so great! Hitherto he had received no pay for what he had done. He was a simple post-office clerk, and was paid for his time by the Crown,—very moderately. On this projected journey all his expenses would be paid for him, and still he would have his salary. Sir John Joram had declared the journey to be quite necessary. The Secretary of State had probably not occupied his mind much with the matter; but in the mind of Bagwax there was a fixed idea that the Secretary thought of little else, and that the Secretary had declared that his hands were tied till Bagwax should have been to Sydney. But his conscience told him that the journey was not necessary, and that the delay would be cruel. In that cab Bagwax made up his mind that he would do his duty like an honest man.

Sir John's chambers in Pump Court were gloomy without, though commodious and ample within. Bagwax was now well known to the clerk, and was received almost as a friend. "I think I've got it all as clear as running water, Mr. Jones," he said, feeling no doubt that Sir John's clerk, Mr. Jones, must feel that interest in the case which pervaded his own mind.

"That will be a good thing for the gentleman in prison, Mr. Bagwax."

"And for the lady; poor lady! I don't know whether I don't think almost more of her than of him." Mr. Jones was returning to his work, having sent in word to Sir John of this visitor's arrival. But Bagwax was too full of his subject, and of his own honesty, for that. "I don't think that I need go out after all, Mr. Jones."

"Oh indeed!"

"Of course it will be a great sell for me."

"Will it, now?"

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"Sydney, I am told, is an Elysium upon earth."

"It's much the same as Botany Bay; isn't it?" asked Jones.

"Oh, not at all; quite a different place. I was reading a book the other day which said that Sydney harbour is the most beautiful thing God ever made on the face of the globe."

"I know there used to be convicts there," said Mr. Jones, very positively.

"Perhaps they had a few once, but never many. They have oranges there, and a Parliament almost as good as our own, and a beautiful new post-office. But I shan't have to go, Mr. Jones. Of course, a man has to do his duty."

"Some do, and more don't. That's as far as I see, Mr. Bagwax."

"I'm all for Nelson's motto, Mr. Jones,—'England expects that every man this day shall do his duty.'" In repeating these memorable words Bagwax raised his voice.

"Sir John don't like to hear anything through the partition, Mr. Bagwax."

"I beg pardon. But whenever I think of that glorious observation I am apt to become a little excited. It'll go a long way, Mr. Jones, in keeping a man straight if he'll only say it to himself often enough."

"But not to roar it out in an eminent barrister's chambers. He didn't hear you, I daresay; only I thought I'd just caution you."

"Quite right, Mr. Jones. Now I mean to do mine. I think we can get the party out of prison without any journey to Sydney at all; and I'm not going to stand in the way of it. I have devoted myself to this case, and I'm not going to let my own interest stand in the

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way. Mr. Jones, let a man be ever so humble, England does expect—that he'll do his duty."

"By George, he'll hear you, Mr. Bagwax;—he will indeed." But at that moment Sir John's bell was rung, and Bagwax was summoned into the great man's room. Sir John was sitting at a large office-table so completely covered with papers that a whole chaos of legal atoms seemed to have been deposited there by the fortuitous operation of ages. Bagwax, who had his large bag in his hand, looked forlornly round the room for some freer and more fitting board on which he might expose his documents. But there was none. There were book-shelves filled with books, and a large sofa which was covered also with papers, and another table laden with what seemed to be a concrete chaos,—whereas the chaos in front of Sir John was a chaos in solution. Sir John liked Bagwax, though he was generally opposed to zealous co-operators. There was in the man a mixture of intelligence and absurdity, of real feeling and affection, of genuine humility as to himself personally and of thorough confidence in himself post-officially, which had gratified Sir John; and Sir John had been quite sure that the post-office clerk had intended to speak the absolute truth, with an honest, manly conviction in the innocence of his client, and in the guilt of the witnesses on the other side. He was therefore well disposed towards Bagwax. "Well, Mr. Bagwax," he said; "so I understand you have got a little further in the matter since I saw you last."

"A good deal further, Sir John."

"As how? Perhaps you can explain it shortly."

This was troublesome. Bagwax did not think that he could explain the matter very shortly. He could not explain the matter at all without showing his en-

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velopes; and how was he to show them in the present condition of that room? He immediately dived into his bag and brought forth the first bundle of envelopes. "Perhaps, Sir John, I had better put them out upon the floor," he said.

"Must I see all those?"

There were many more bundles within which Bagwax was anxious that the barrister should examine minutely. "It is very important, Sir John. It is indeed. It is really altogether a case of postmarks,—altogether. We have never in our branch had anything so interesting before. If we can show that that envelope certainly was not stamped with that postmark in the Sydney post-office on the 10th May, 1873, then we shall get him out,—shan't we?"

"It will be very material, Mr. Bagwax," said Sir John, cautiously.

"They will all have sworn falsely, and then somebody must have obtained the postmark surreptitiously. There must have been a regular plant. The stamp must have been made up and dated on purpose,—so as to give a false date. Some official in the Sydney post-office must have been employed."

"That's what we want you to find out over there," said Sir John, who was not quite so zealous, perhaps not quite so conscientious, as his more humble assistant,—whose mind was more occupied with other matters. "You'll find out all that at Sydney."

The temptation was very great. Sir John wanted him to go,—told him that he ought to go! Sir John was the man responsible for the whole matter. He, Bagwax, had done his best. Could it be right for him to provoke Sir John by contesting the matter,—contesting it so much to his own disadvantage? Had he

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not done enough for honesty?—enough to satisfy even that grand idea of duty? As he turned the bundle of documents round in his hand, he made up his mind that he had not done enough. There was a little gurgle in his throat, almost a tear in his eye, as he replied, "I don't think I should be wanted to go if you would look at these envelopes."

Sir John understood it all at once,—and there was much to understand. He knew how anxious the man was to go on this projected journey, and he perceived the cause which was inducing him to surrender his own interests. He remembered that the journey must be made at a great expense to his own client. He ran over the case in his mind, and acknowledged to himself that conclusive evidence,—evidence that should be quite conclusive,—of fraud as to the envelope, might possibly suffice to release his client at once from prison. He told himself also that he could not dare to express an opinion on the matter himself without a close inspection of those postmarks,—that a close inspection might probably take two hours, and that the two hours would finally have to be abstracted from the already curtailed period of his nightly slumbers. Then he thought of the state of his tables, and of the difficulties as to space. Perhaps that idea was the one strongest in his mind against the examination.

But then what a hero was Bagwax! What self-abnegation was there! Should he be less ready to devote himself to his client,—he, who was paid for his work,—than this post-office clerk, who was as pure in his honesty as he was zealous in the cause? "There are a great many of them, I suppose?" he said, almost whining.

"A good many, Sir John."

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"Have at it!" said the Queen's Counsel and late Attorney-General, springing up from his chair. Bagwax almost jumped out of the way, so startled was he by the quick and sudden movement. Sir John rang his bell; but not waiting for the clerk, began to hurl the chaos in solution on to the top of the concrete chaos. Bagwax naturally attempted to assist him. "For G—'s sake, don't you touch them!" said Sir John, as though avenging himself by a touch of scorn for the evil thing which was being done to him. Then Jones hurried into the room, and with more careful hands assisted his master, trying to preserve some order with the disturbed papers. In this way the large office-table was within three minutes made clear for the Bagwaxian strategy. Mr. Jones declared afterwards that it was seven years since he had seen the entire top of that table. "Now go ahead!" said Sir John, who seemed, during the operation, to have lost something of his ordinary dignity.

Bagwax, who since that little check had been standing perfectly still, with his open bag in his hands, at once began his work. The plain before him was immense, and he was able to marshal all his forces. In the centre, and nearest to Sir John, as he sat in his usual chair, were exposed all the Mays, '73. For it was thus that he denominated the envelopes, with which he was so familiar. There were 71's, and 72's, and 74's, and 75's. But the 73's were all arranged in months, and then in days. He began by explaining that he had obtained all these envelopes "promiscuously," as he said. There had been no selection, none had been rejected. Then courteously handing his official magnifying-glass to the barrister, he invited him to inspect them all generally,—to make, as it were, a first cursory in-

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spection,—so that he might see that there was not one perfect impression, perfect as that impression on the Caldigate envelope was perfect. "Not one," said Bagwax, beating his bosom in triumph.

"That seems perfect," said Sir John, pointing with the glass to a selected specimen.

"Your eyes are very good, Sir John,—very good indeed. You have found the cleanest and truest of the whole lot. But if you'll examine the tail of the Y, you'll see it's been rubbed a little. And then if you'll follow with your eye the circular line which makes up the round of the postmark, you'll find a dent on the outside bar. I go more on the dents in those bars, Sir John, than I do on the figures. All the bars are dented more or less,—particularly the Mays, '73. They don't remain quite true, Sir John,—not after a day's fair use. They've taken a new stamp out of the store to do the Caldigate envelope. They couldn't get at the stamps in use. That's how it has been."

Sir John listened in silence as he continued to examine one envelope after another through the glass. "Now, Sir John, if we come to the Mays, '73, we shall find that just about that time there has been no new stamp brought into use. There isn't one, either, that is exactly the Caldigate breadth. I've brought a rule by which you can get to the fiftieth of an inch." Here Bagwax brought out a little ivory instrument marked all over with figures. "Of course they're intended to be of the same pattern. But gradually, very gradually, the circle has always become smaller. Isn't that conclusive? The Caldigate impression is a little, very little —ever so little—but a little smaller than any of the May, '73. Isn't that conclusive?"

"If I understand it, Mr. Bagwax, you don't pretend

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to say that you have got impressions of all the stamps which may have been in use in the Sydney office at that time? But in Sydney, if I understand the matter rightly, they keep daily impressions of all the stamps in a book."

"Just so—just so, Sir John," said Bagwax, feeling that every word spoken to the lawyer renewed his own hopes of going out to Sydney,—but feeling also that Sir John would be wrong, very wrong, if he subjected his client to so unnecessarily prolonged a detention in the Cambridge county prison. "They do keep a book which would be quite conclusive. I could have the pages photographed."

"Would not that be best? and you might probably find out who it was who gave this fraudulent aid."

"I could find out everything," said Bagwax, energetically; "but——"

"But what?"

"It is all found out there. It is indeed, Sir John. If I could get you to go along with me, you would see that that letter couldn't have gone through the Sydney post-office."

"I think I do see it. But it is so difficult, Mr. Bagwax, to make others see things."

"And if it didn't,—and it never did;—but if it didn't, why did they say it did? Why did they swear it did? Isn't that enough to make any Secretary let him go?"

The energy, the zeal, the true faith of the man, were admirable. Sir John was half disposed to rise from his seat to embrace the man, and hail him as his brother,—only that had he done so he would have made himself as ridiculous as Bagwax. Zeal is always ridiculous. "I think I see it all," he said.

"And won't they let the man go?"

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"There were four persons who swore positively that they were present at the marriage, one of them being the woman who is said to have been married. That is direct evidence. With all our search, we have hitherto found no one to give us any direct evidence to rebut this. Then they brought forward, to corroborate these statements, a certain amount of circumstantial evidence,—and among other things this letter."

"The Caldigate envelope," said Bagwax, eagerly.

"What you call the Caldigate envelope. It was unnecessary, perhaps; and, if fraudulent, certainly foolish. They would have had their verdict without it."

"But they did it," said Bagwax, in a tone of triumph.

"It is a pity, Mr. Bagwax, you were not brought up to our profession. You would have made a great lawyer."

"Oh, Sir John!"

"Yes, they did it. And if it can be proved that they have done it fraudulently, no doubt that fraud will stain the direct evidence. But we have to remember that the verdict has been already obtained. We are not struggling now with a jury, but with an impassive emblem of sovereign justice."

"And therefore the real facts will go the further, Sir John."

"Well argued, Mr. Bagwax,—admirably well argued. If you should ever be called, I hope I may not have you against me very often. But I will think of it all. You can take the envelopes away with you, because you have impressed me vividly with all that they can tell me. My present impression is, that you had better take the journey. But within the next few days I will give a little more thought to it, and you shall hear from me." Then he put out his hand, which was a courtesy Mr.

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Bagwax had never before enjoyed. "You may believe me, Mr. Bagwax, when I say that I have come across many remarkable men in many cases which have fallen into my hands,—but that I have rarely encountered a man whom I have more thoroughly respected than I do you."

Mr. Bagwax went away to his own lodging exulting,—but more than ever resolved that the journey to Sydney was unnecessary. As usual, he spent a large portion of that afternoon in contemplating the envelopes; and then, as he was doing so, another idea struck him,—an idea which made him tear his hairs with disgust because it had not occurred to him before. There was now opened to him a new scope of inquiry, an altogether different matter of evidence. But the idea was by far too important to be brought in and explained at the fag end of a chapter.

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CHAPTER XVII

ALL THE SHANDS

THERE had been something almost approaching to exultation at Babington when the tidings of Caldigate's alleged Australian wife were first heard there. As the anger had been great that Julia should be rejected, so had the family congratulation been almost triumphant when the danger which had been escaped was appreciated. There had been something of the same feeling at Pollington among the Shands,—who had no doubt allowed themselves to think that Maria had been ill-treated by John Caldigate. He ought to have married Maria,—at least such was the opinion of the ladies of the family, who were greatly impressed with the importance of the little book which had been carried away. But in regard to the Australian marriage, they had differed among themselves. That Maria should have escaped the terrible doom which had befallen Mrs. Bolton's daughter, was, of course, a source of comfort, But Maria herself would never believe the evil story. John Caldigate had not been,——well, perhaps not quite true to her. So much she acknowledged gently with the germ of a tear in her eye. But she was quite sure that he would not have married Hester Bolton while another wife was living in Australia. She arose almost to enthusiasm as she vindicated his character from so base a stain. He had been, perhaps, a little unstable in his affections,—as men are so com-

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monly. But not even when the jury found their verdict, could she be got to believe that the John Caldigate whom she had known would have betrayed a girl whom he loved as he was supposed to have betrayed Hester Bolton. The mother and sisters, who knew the softness of Maria's disposition,—and who had been more angry than their sister with the man who had been wicked enough to carry away Thomson's "Seasons" in his portmanteau without marrying the girl who had put it there,—would not agree to this. The verdict, at any rate, was a verdict. John Caldigate was in prison. The poor young woman with her infant was a nameless, unfortunate creature. All this might have happened to their Maria. "I should always have believed him innocent," said Maria, wiping away the germ of a tear with her knuckle.

The matter was very often discussed in the doctor's house at Pollington,—as it was, indeed, by the public generally, and especially in the eastern counties. But in this house there a double interest attached to it. In the first place, there was Maria's escape,—which the younger girls were accustomed to talk of as having been "almost miraculous"; and then there was Dick's absolute disappearance. It had been declared at the trial, on behalf of Caldigate, that if Dick could have been put into the witness-box, he would have been able to swear that there had been no such marriage ceremony as that which the four witnesses had elaborately described. On the other hand, the woman and Crinkett had sworn boldly that Dick Shand, though not present at the marriage, had been well aware that it had taken place, and that Dick, could his evidence have been secured, would certainly have been a witness on their side. He had been outside the tent,—so said the woman,

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—when the marriage was being performed, and had refused to enter, by way of showing his continued hostility to an arrangement which he had always opposed. But when the woman said this, it was known that Dick Shand would not appear, and the opinion was general that Dick had died in his poverty and distress. Men who sink to be shepherds in Australia because they are noted drunkards, generally do die. The continued abstinence of perhaps six months in the wilderness is agonising at first, and nearly fatal. Then the poor wretch rushes to the joys of an orgy with ten or fifteen pounds in his pocket; and the stuff which is given to him as brandy soon puts an end to his sufferings. There was but little doubt that such had been the fate of Dick,—unless, perhaps, in the bosom of Maria and of her mother.

It was known too at Pollington, as well as elsewhere, in the month of August, that efforts were still to be made with the view of upsetting the verdict. Something had crept out to the public as to the researches made by Bagwax, and allusions had been frequent as to the unfortunate absence of Dick Shand. The betting, had there been betting, would no doubt have been in favour of the verdict. The four witnesses had told their tale in a straightforward way; and though they were, from their characters, not entitled to perfect credit, still their evidence had in no wise been shaken. They were mean, dishonest folk, no doubt. They had taken Caldigate's money, and had still gone on with the prosecution. Even if there had been some sort of a marriage, the woman should have taken herself off when she received the money, and left poor Hester to enjoy her happiness, her husband, and her home at Bolton. That was the general feeling. But

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it was hardly thought that Bagwax, with his envelope, would prevail over Judge Bramber in the mind of the Secretary of State. Probably there had been a marriage. But it was singular that the two men who could have given unimpeachable evidence on the matter should both have vanished out of the world; Allan, the minister,—and Dick Shand, the miner and shepherd.

"What will she do when he comes out?" Maria asked. Mrs. Rewble,—Harriet,—the curate's wife, was there. Mr. Rewble, as curate, found it convenient to make frequent visits to his father-in-law's house. And Mrs. Posttlethwaite,—Matilda,—was with them, as Mr. Posttlethwaite's business in the soap line caused him to live at Pollington. And there were two unmarried sisters, Fanny and Jane. Mrs. Rewble was by this time quite the matron, and Mrs. Posttlethwaite was also the happy mother of children. But Maria was still Maria. Fanny already had a string to her bow,—and Jane was expectant of many strings.

"She ought to go back to her father and mother, of course," said Mrs. Rewble, indignantly.

"I know I wouldn't," said Jane.

"You know nothing about it, miss, and you ought not to speak of such a thing," said the curate's wife. Jane at this made a grimace which was intended to be seen only by her sister Fanny.

"It is very hard that two loving hearts should be divided," said Maria.

"I never thought so much of John Caldigate as you did," said Mrs. Posttlethwaite. "He seems to have been able to love a good many young women all at the same time."

"It's like tasting a lot of cheeses, till you get the one that suits you," said Jane. This offended the

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elder sister so grievously that she declared she did not know what their mother was about, to allow such liberty to the girls, and then suggested that the conversation should be changed.

"I'm sure I did not say anything wrong," said Jane, "and I suppose it is like that. A gentleman has to find out whom he likes best. And as he liked Miss Bolton best, I think it's a thousand pities they should be parted."

"Ten thousand pities!" said Maria enthusiastically.

"Particularly as there is a baby," said Jane,—upon which Mrs. Rewble was again very angry.

"If Dick were to come home, he'd clear it all up at once," said Mrs. Posttlethwaite.

"Dick will never come home," said Matilda mournfully.

"Never!" said Mrs. Rewble. "I'm afraid that he has expiated all his indiscretions. It should make us who were born girls thankful that we have not been subjected to the same temptations."

"I should like to be a man all the same," said Jane.

"You do not at all know what you are saying," replied the monitor. "How little have you realised what poor Dick must have suffered! I wonder when they are going to let us have tea. I'm almost famished." Mrs. Rewble was known in the family for having a good appetite. They were sitting at this moment round a table on the lawn, at which they intended to partake of their evening meal. The doctor might or might not join them. Mrs. Shand, who did not like the open air, would have hers sent to her in the drawing-room. Mr. Rewble would certainly be there. Mr. Posttlethwaite, who had been home to his dinner, had gone back to the soap-works. "Don't you think, Jane, if you were to go

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in, you could hurry them?" Then Jane went in and hurried the servant.

"There's a strange man with papa," said Jane, as she returned.

"There are always strange men with papa," said Fanny. "I daresay he has come to have his tooth out." For the doctor's practice was altogether general. From a baby to a back-tooth, he attended to everything now, as he had done forty years ago.

"But this man isn't like a patient. The door was half open, and I saw papa holding him by both hands."

"A lunatic!" exclaimed Mrs. Rewble, thinking that Mr. Rewble ought to be sent at once to her father's assistance.

"He was quite quiet, and just for a moment I could see papa's face. It wasn't a patient at all. Oh Maria!"

"What is it, child?" asked Mrs. Rewble.

"I do believe that Dick has come back."

They all jumped up from their seats suddenly. Then Mrs. Rewble reseated herself. "Jane is such a fool!" she said.

"I do believe it," said Jane. "He had yellow trousers on, as if he had come from a long way off. And I'm sure papa was very glad,—why should he take both his hands?"

"I feel as though my legs were sinking under me," said Maria.

"I don't think it possible for a moment," said Mrs. Rewble. "Maria, you are so romantic! You would believe anything."

"It is possible," said Mrs. Posttlethwaite.

"If you will remain here, I will go into the house and inquire," said Mrs. Rewble. But it did not suit the others to remain there. For a moment the sug-

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gestion had been so awful that they had not dared to stir; but when the elder sister slowly moved towards the door which led into the house from the garden, they all followed her. Then suddenly they heard a scream, which they knew to come from their mother. "I believe it is Dick," said Mrs. Rewble, standing in the doorway so as to detain the others. "What ought we to do?"

"Let me go in," said Jane, impetuously. "He is my brother."

Maria was already dissolved in tears. Mrs. Posttlethwaite was struck dumb by the awfulness of the occasion, and clung fast to her sister Matilda.

"It will be like one from the grave," said Mrs. Rewble, solemnly.

"Let me go in," repeated Jane, impetuously. Then she pushed by her sisters, and was the first to enter the house. They all followed her into the hall, and there they found their mother supported in the arms of the man who wore the yellow trousers. Dick Shand had in truth returned to his father's house.

The first thing to do with a returned prodigal is to kiss him, and the next to feed him; and therefore Dick was led away at once to the table on the lawn. But he gave no sign of requiring the immediate slaughter of a fatted calf. Though he had not exactly the appearance of a well-to-do English gentleman, he did not seem to be in want. The yellow trousers were of strong material, and in good order, made of that colour for colonial use, probably with the idea of expressing some contempt for the dingy hues which prevail among the legs of men at home. He wore a very large-checked waistcoat, and a stout square coat of the same material. There was no look of poverty,

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and no doubt he had that day eaten a substantial dinner; but the anxious mother was desirous of feeding him immediately, and whispered to Jane some instructions as to cold beef, which was to be added to the tea and toast.

As they examined him, holding him by the arms and hands, and gazing up into his face, the same idea occurred to all of them. Though they knew him very well now, they would hardly have known him had they met him suddenly in the streets. He seemed to have grown fifteen years older during the seven years of his absence. His face had become thin and long and almost hollow. His beard went all round under his chin, and was clipped into the appearance of a stiff thick hedge—equally thick, and equally broad, and equally protrusive at all parts. And within this enclosure it was shorn. But his mouth had sunk in, and his eyes. In colour he was almost darker than brown. You would have said that his skin had been tanned black, but for the infusion of red across it here and there. He seemed to be in good present health, but certainly bore the traces of many hardships. "And here you are all just as I left you," he said, counting up his sisters.

"Not exactly," said Mrs. Rewble, remembering her family. "And Matilda has got two."

"Not husbands, I hope," said Dick.

"Oh Dick! that is so like you," said Jane, getting up and kissing him again in her delight. Then Mr. Rewble came forward, and the brothers-in-law renewed their old acquaintance.

"It seems just like the other day," said Dick, looking round upon the rose-bushes.

"Oh my boy! my darling, darling boy!" said the

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mother, who had hurried upstairs for her shawl, conscious of her rheumatism even amidst the excitement of her son's return. "Oh Dick! This is the happiest day of all my life. Wouldn't you like something better than tea?" This she said with many memories and many thoughts; but still, with a mother's love, unable to refrain from offering what she thought her son would wish to have.

"There ain't anything better," said Dick very solemnly.

"Nothing half so good to my thinking," said Mrs. Rewble, imagining that by a word in season she might help the good work.

The mother's eyes were filled with tears, but she did not dare to speak a word. Then there was a silence for a few moments. "Tell us all about it, Dick," said the father. "There's whisky inside if you like it." Dick shook his head solemnly,—but, as they all thought, with a certain air of regret. "Tell us what you have to say," repeated the doctor.

"I'm sworn off these two years."

"Touched nothing for two years?" said the mother exultingly, with her arms and shawl again round her son's neck.

"A teetotaller?" said Maria.

"Anything you like to call it. Only what a gentleman's habits are in that respect needn't be made the subject of general remark." It was evident he was a little sore, and Jane, therefore, offered him a dish full of gooseberries. He took the plate in his hand and ate them assiduously for a while in silence, as though unconscious of what he was doing. "You know all about it now, don't you?"

"Oh my dearest boy!" ejaculated the mother.

"You didn't get better gooseberries than those on

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your travels," said the doctor, calling him back to the condition of the world around him.

Then he told them of his adventures. For two terrible years he had been a shepherd on different sheep runs up in Queensland. Then he had found employment on a sugar plantation, and had superintended the work of a gang of South Sea Islanders,—Canakers they are called,—men who are brought into the colony from the islands of the Pacific,—and who return thence to their homes generally every three years, much to the regret of their employers. In the transit of these men agents are employed, and to this service Dick had, after a term, found himself promoted. Then it had come to pass that he had remained for a period on one of these islands, with the view of persuading the men to emigrate and re-emigrate; and had thus been resident among them for more than a couple of years. They had used him well, and he had liked the islands, —having lived in one of them without seeing another European for many months. Then the payments which had from time to time been made to him by the Queensland planters were stopped, and his business, such as it had been, came to an end. He had found himself with just sufficient money to bring him home; and here he was.

"My boy, my darling boy!" exclaimed his mother again, as though all their joint troubles were now over.

The doctor remembered the adage of the rolling stone, and felt that the return of a son at the age of thirty, without any means of maintaining himself, was hardly an unalloyed blessing. He was not the man to turn a son out of doors. He had always broadened his back to bear the full burden of his large family. But even at this moment he was a little melancholy as he thought of the difficulty of finding employment for the

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wearer of those yellow trousers. How was it possible that a man should continue to live an altogether idle life at Pollington and still remain a teetotaller? "Have you any plans I can help you in now?" he asked.

"Of course he'll remain at home for a while before he thinks of anything," said the mother.

"I suppose I must look about me," said Dick. "By-the-by, what has become of John Caldigate?"

They all at once gazed at each other. It could hardly be that he did not know in truth what had become of John Caldigate.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Maria.

"Of course he has heard," said Mrs. Rewble.

"You must have heard," said the mother.

"I don't in the least know what you are talking about. I have heard nothing at all."

In very truth he had heard nothing of his old friend,—not even that he had returned to England. Then by degrees the whole story was told to him. "I know that he was putting a lot of money together," said Dick enviously. "Married Hester Bolton? I thought he would! Bigamy! Euphemia Smith! Married before! Certainly not at the diggings."

"He wasn't married up at Ahalala?" asked the doctor.

"To Euphemia Smith? I was there when they quarrelled, and when she went into partnership with Crinkett. I am sure there was no such marriage. John Caldigate in prison for bigamy? And he paid them twenty thousand pounds? The more fool he!"

"They all say that."

"But it's an infernal plant. As sure as my name is Richard Shand, John Caldigate never married that woman."

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CHAPTER XVIII

AGAIN AT SIR JOHN'S CHAMBERS

And this was the man as to whom it had been acknowledged that his evidence, if it could be obtained, would be final. The return of Dick himself was to the Shands an affair so much more momentous than the release of John Caldigate from prison, that for some hours or so the latter subject was allowed to pass out of sight. The mother got him upstairs and asked after his linen,—vain inquiry,—and arranged for his bed, turning all the little Rewbles into one small room. In the long run, grandmothers are more tender to their grandchildren than their own offspring. But at this moment Dick was predominant. How grand a thing to have her son returned to her, and such a son,—a teetotaller of two years' growth, who had seen all the world of the Pacific Ocean! As he could not take whisky and water, would he like ginger-beer before he went to bed,—or arrowroot? Dick decided in favour of ginger-beer, and consented to be embraced again.

It was, I think, to Maria's credit that she was the first to bring back the conversation to John Caldigate's marriage. "Was she a very horrible woman?" Maria asked, referring to Euphemia Smith.

"There were a good many of 'em out there, greedy after gold," said Dick; "but she beat 'em all; and she was awfully clever."

"In what way, Dick?" asked Mrs. Rewble. "Be-

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cause she does not seem to me to have done very well with herself."

"She knew more about shares than any man of them all. But I think she just drank a little. It was that which disgusted Caldigate."

"He had been very fond of her?" suggested Maria.

"I never knew a man so taken with a woman." Maria blushed, and Mrs. Rewble looked round at her younger sisters as though desirous that they should be sent to bed. "All that began on board the ship. Then he was fool enough to run after her down to Sydney; and of course she followed him up to the mines."

"I don't know why of course," said Mrs. Posttlethwaite, defending her sex generally.

"Well, she did. And he was going to marry her. He did mean to marry her;—there's no doubt of that. But it was a queer kind of life that we lived up there."

"I suppose so," said the doctor. Mrs. Rewble again looked at the girls and then at her mother; but Mrs. Shand was older and less timid than her married daughter. Mrs. Rewble when a girl herself had never been sent away, and was now a pattern of female discretion.

"And she," continued Dick, "as soon as she had begun to finger the scrip, thought of nothing but gold. She did not care much for marriage just then, because she fancied the stuff wouldn't belong to herself. She became largely concerned in the 'Old-Stick-in-the-Mud.' That was Crinkett's concern, and there were times at which I thought she would marry him. Then Caldigate got rid of her altogether. That was before I went away."

"He never married her?" asked the doctor.

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"He certainly hadn't married her when I left Nobble in June, '73."

"You can swear to that, Dick?"

"Certainly I can. I was with him every day. But there wasn't anyone round there who didn't know how it was. Crinkett himself knew it."

"Crinkett is one of the gang against him."

"And there was a man named Adamson. Adamson knew."

"He's another of the conspirators," said the doctor.

"They won't dare to say before me," declared Dick, stoutly, "that Mrs. Smith and John Caldigate had become man and wife before June, '73. And they hated one another so much then that it is impossible they should have come together since. I can swear they were not married up to June, '73."

"You'll have to swear it," said the doctor, "and that with as little delay as possible."

All this took place towards the end of August, about five weeks after the trial, and a day or two subsequent to the interview between Bagwax and the Attorney-General. Bagwax was now vehemently prosecuting his inquiries as to that other idea which had struck him, and was at this very moment glowing with the anticipation of success, and at the same time broken-hearted with the conviction that he never would see the pleasant things of New South Wales.

On the next morning, under the auspices of his father, Dick Shand wrote the following letter to Mr. Seely, the attorney:

"POLLINGTON, 30*th August*, 187—.

"SIR,—I think it right to tell you that I reached my father's house in this town late yesterday even-

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ing. I have come direct from one of the South Sea Islands *viâ* Honolulu and San Francisco, and have not yet been in England forty-eight hours. I am an old friend of Mr. John Caldigate, and went with him from England to the gold diggings in New South Wales. My name will be known to you, as I am now aware that it was frequently mentioned in the course of the late trial. It will probably seem odd to you that I had never even heard of the trial till I reached my father's house last night. I did not know that Caldigate had married Miss Bolton, nor that Euphemia Smith had claimed him as her husband.

"I am able and willing to swear that they had not become man and wife up to June, 1873, and that no one at Ahalala or Nobble conceived them to be man and wife. Of course, they had lived together. But everybody knew all about it. Some time before June,—early, I should say, in that autumn,—there had been a quarrel. I am sure that they were at daggers drawn with each other all that April and May in respect to certain mining shares, as to which Euphemia Smith behaved very badly. I don't think it possible that they should ever have come together again; but in May, '73, —which is the date I have heard named,—they certainly were not man and wife.

"I have thought it right to inform you of this immediately on my return, and am, your obedient servant,

"RICHARD SHAND."

Mr. Seely, when he received this letter, found it to be his duty to take it at once to Sir John Joram, up in London. He did not believe Dick Shand. But then he had put no trust in Bagwax, and had been from the first convinced, in his own mind, that Caldi-

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gate had married the woman. As soon as it was known to him that his client had paid twenty thousand pounds to Crinkett and the woman, he was quite sure of the guilt of his client. He had done the best for Caldigate at the trial, as he would have done for any other client; but he had never felt any of that enthusiasm which had instigated Sir John. Now that Caldigate was in prison, Mr. Seely thought that he might as well be left there quietly, trusting to the verdict, trusting to Judge Bramber, and trusting still more strongly on his own early impressions. This letter from Dick,—whom he knew to have been a ruined drunkard, a disgrace to his family, and an outcast from society,—was to his thinking just such a letter as would be got up in such a case, in the futile hope of securing the succour of a Secretary of State. He was sure that no Secretary of State would pay the slightest attention to such a letter. But still it would be necessary that he should show it to Sir John, and as a trip to London was not disagreeable to his professional mind, he started with it on the very day of its receipt.

"Of course we must have his deposition on oath," said Sir John.

"You think it will be worth while?"

"Certainly. I am more convinced than ever that there was no marriage. The post-office clerk has been with me,—Bagwax,—and has altogether convinced me."

"I didn't think so much of Bagwax, Sir John."

"I daresay not, Mr. Seely;—an absurdly energetic man,—one of those who destroy by their over-zeal all the credit which their truth and energy ought to produce. But he has, I think, convinced me that that letter could not have passed through the Sydney post-office in May, '73."

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"If so, Sir John, even that is not much,—towards upsetting a verdict."

"A good deal, I think, when the characters of the persons are considered. Now comes this man, whom we all should have believed, had he been present, and tells this story. You had better get hold of him and bring him to me, Mr. Seely."

Then Mr. Seely hung up his hat in London for three or four days, and sent to Pollington for Dick Shand. Dick Shand obeyed the order, and both of them waited together upon Sir John. "You have come back at a very critical point of time for your friend," said the barrister.

Dick had laid aside the coat and waistcoat with the broad checks, and the yellow trousers, and had made himself look as much like an English gentleman as the assistance of a ready-made clothes shop at Pollington would permit. But still he did not quite look like a man who had spent three years at Cambridge. His experiences among the gold diggings, then his period of maddening desolation as a Queensland shepherd, and after that his life among the savages in a South Sea island, had done much to change him. Sir John and Mr. Seely together almost oppressed him. But still he was minded to speak up for his friend. Caldigate had, upon the whole, been very good to him, and Dick was honest. "He has been badly used, anyway," he said.

"You have had no intercourse with any of his friends since you have been home, I think?" This question Sir John asked because Mr. Seely had suggested that this appearance of the man at this special moment might not improbably be what he called a "plant."

"I have had no intercourse with anybody, sir. I

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came here last Friday, and I hadn't spoken a word to anybody before that. I didn't know that Caldigate had been in trouble at all. My people at Pollington were the first to tell me about it."

"Then you wrote to Mr. Seely? You had heard of Mr. Seely?"

"The governor,—that's my father,—he had heard of Mr. Seely. I wrote first as he told me. They knew all about it at Pollington as well as you do."

"You were surprised then when you heard the story?"

"Knocked off my pins, sir. I never was so much taken aback in my life. To be told that John Caldigate had married Euphemia Smith after all that I had seen,—and that he had been married to her in May, '73! I knew of course that it was all a got-up thing. And he's in prison?"

"He is in prison, certainly."

"For bigamy?"

"Indeed he is, Mr. Shand."

"And how about his real wife?"

"His real wife, as you call her——"

"She is, as sure as my name is Richard Shand."

"It is on behalf of that lady that we are almost more anxious than for Mr. Caldigate himself. In this matter she has been perfectly innocent; and whoever may have been the culprit,—or culprits,—she has been cruelly ill-used."

"She'll have her husband back again, of course," said Dick.

"That will depend in part upon what faith the judge who tried the case may place in your story. Your deposition shall be taken, and it will be my duty to submit it to the Secretary of State. He will prob-

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ably be actuated by the weight which this further evidence will have upon the judge who heard the former evidence. You will understand, Mr. Shand, that your word will be opposed to the words of four other persons."

"Four perjured scoundrels," said Dick, with energy.

"Just so,—if your story be true."

"It is true, sir," said Dick, with much anger in his tone.

"I hope so,—with all my heart. You are on the same side with us, you know. I only want to make you understand how much ground there may be for doubt. It is not easy to upset a verdict. And, I fear, many righteous verdicts would be upset if the testimony of one man could do it. Perhaps you will be able to prove that you only arrived at Liverpool on Saturday night."

"Certainly I can."

"You cannot prove that you had not heard of the case before."

"Certainly I can. I can swear it." Sir John smiled. "They all knew that at Pollington. They told me of it. The governor told me about Mr. Seely, and made me write the letter."

"That would not be evidence," said Sir John.

"Heavens on earth! I tell you I was struck all on a heap when I heard it, just as much as if they had said he'd been hung for murder. You put Crinkett and me together and then you'll know. I suppose you think somebody's paying me for this,—that I've got a regular tip."

"Not at all, Mr. Shand. And I quite understand that it should be difficult for you to understand. When a man sees a thing clearly himself he cannot always

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realise the fact that others do not see it also. I think I perceive what you have to tell us, and we are very much obliged to you for coming forward so immediately. Perhaps you would not mind sitting in the other room for five minutes while I say a word to Mr. Seely."

"I can go away altogether."

"Mr. Seely will be glad to see you again with reference to the deposition you will have to make. You shall not be kept waiting long." Then Dick returned, with a sore heart, feeling half inclined to blaze out in wrath against the great advocate. He had come forward to tell a plain story, having nothing to gain, paying his railway fare and other expenses out of his own—or rather out of his father's pocket, and was told he would not be believed! It is always hard to make an honest witness understand that it may be the duty of others to believe him to be a liar, and Dick Shand did not understand it now.

"There was no Australian marriage," Sir John said as soon as he was alone with Mr. Seely.

"You think not?"

"My mind is clear about it. We must get that man out if it be only for the sake of the lady."

"It is so very easy, Sir John, to have a story like that made up."

"I have had to do with a good many made-up stories, Mr. Seely;—and with a good many true stories."

"Of course, Sir John;—no man with more."

"He might be a party to making up a story. There is nothing that I have seen in him to make me sure that he could not come forward with a determined perjury. I shouldn't think it, but it would be possible. But his father and mother and sisters wouldn't join him." Dick

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had told the story of the meeting on the lawn at great length. "And had it been a plot, he couldn't have imposed upon them. He wouldn't have brought them into it. And who would have got at him to arrange the plot?"

"Old Caldigate."

Sir John shook his head. "Neither old Caldigate or young Caldigate knew anything of that kind of work. And then his story tallies altogether with my hero Bagwax. Of Bagwax I am quite sure. And as Shand corroborates Bagwax, I am nearly sure of him also. You must take his deposition, and let me have it. It should be rather full, as it may be necessary to hear the depositions also of the doctor and his wife. We shall have to get him out."

"You know best, Sir John."

"We shall have to get him out, Mr. Seely, I think," said Sir John, rising from his chair. Then Mr. Seely took his leave, as was intended.

Mr. Seely was not at all convinced. He was quite willing that John Caldigate should be released from prison, and that the Australian marriage should be so put out of general credit in England as to allow the young people to live in comfort at Folking as man and wife. But he liked to feel that he knew better himself. He would have been quite content that Mrs. John Caldigate should be Mrs. John Caldigate to all the world, —that all the world should be imposed on,—so that he was made subject to no imposition. In this matter, Sir John appeared to him to be no wider awake than a mere layman. It was clear to Mr. Seely that Dick Shand's story was "got up,"—and very well got up. He had no pang of conscience as to using it. But when

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it came to believing it, that was quite another thing. The man turning up exactly at the moment! And such a man! And then his pretending never to have heard of a case so famous! Never to have heard this story of his most intimate friend! And then his notorious poverty! Old Caldigate would of course be able to buy such a man. And then Sir John's fatuity as to Bagwax! He could hardly bring himself to believe that Sir John was quite in earnest. But he was well aware that Sir John would know,—no one better—by what arguments such a verdict as had been given might be practically set aside. The verdict would remain. But a pardon, if a pardon could be got from the Secretary of State, would make the condition of the husband and wife the same as though there had been no verdict. The indignities which they had already suffered would simply produce for them the affectionate commendation of all England. Mr. Seely felt all that, and was not at all averse to a pardon. He was not at all disposed to be severe on Caldigate senior if, as he thought, Caldigate senior had bribed this convenient new witness. But it was too much to expect that he should believe it all himself.

"You must come with me, Mr. Shand," he said, "and we must take your story down in writing. Then you must swear to it before a magistrate."

"All right, Mr. Seely."

"We must be very particular, you know."

"I needn't be particular at all;—and as to what Sir John Joram said, I felt half inclined to punch his head."

"That wouldn't have helped us."

"It was only that I thought of Caldigate in prison

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that I didn't do it. Because I have been roaming about the world, not always quite as well off as himself, he tells me that he doesn't believe my word."

"I don't think he said that."

"He didn't quite dare; but what he said was as bad. He told me that someone else wouldn't believe it. I don't quite understand what it is they're not to believe. All I say is that they two were not married in May, '73."

"But about your never having heard of the case till you got home?"

"I never had heard a word about it. One would think that I had done something wrong in coming forward to tell what I know." The deposition, however, was drawn out in due form, at considerable length, and was properly attested before one of the London magistrates.

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CHAPTER XIX

DICK SHAND GOES TO CAMBRIDGESHIRE

THE news of Shand's return was soon common in Cambridge. The tidings, of course, were told to Mr. Caldigate, and were then made known by him to Hester. The old man, though he turned the matter much in his mind,—doubting whether the hopes thus raised would not add to Hester's sorrow should they not ultimately be realised—decided that he could not keep her in the dark. Her belief could not be changed by any statement which Shand might make. Her faith was so strong that no evidence could shake it,—or confirm it. But there would, no doubt, arise in her mind a hope of liberation if any new evidence against the Australian marriage were to reach her; which hope might so probably be delusive! But he knew her to be strong to endure as well as strong to hope, and therefore he told her at once. Then Mr. Seely returned to Cambridge, and all the facts of Shand's deposition were made known at Folking. "That will get him out at once, of course," said Hester, triumphantly, as soon as she heard it. But the Squire was older and more cautions, and still doubted. He explained that Dick Shand was not a man who by his simple word would certainly convince a Secretary of State;—that deceit might be suspected;—that a fraudulent plot would be possible; and that very much care was necessary before a convicted prisoner would be released.

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"I am quite sure, from Mr. Seely's manner, that he thinks I have bribed the young man," said Caldigate.

"You!"

"Yes;—I. These are the ideas which naturally come into people's heads. I am not in the least angry with Mr. Seely, and feel that it is only too likely that the Secretary of State and the judge will think the same. If I were Secretary of State I should have to think so."

"I couldn't suspect people like that."

"And therefore, my dear, you are hardly fit to be Secretary of State. We must not be too sanguine. That is all."

But Hester was very sanguine. When it was fully known that Dick had written to Mr. Seely immediately on his arrival at Pollington, and that he had shown himself to be a warm partisan in the Caldigate interests, she could not rest till she saw him herself, and persuaded Mr. Caldigate to invite him down to Folking. To Folking therefore he went, with the full intention of declaring John Caldigate's innocence, not only there, but all through Cambridgeshire. The Boltons, of whom he had now heard something, should be made to know what an honest man had to say on the subject,—an honest man, who was really on the spot at the time. To Dick's mind it was marvellous that the Boltons should have been anxious to secure a verdict against Caldigate,—which verdict was also against their own daughter and their own sister. Being quite sure himself that Caldigate was innocent, he could not understand the condition of feeling which would be produced by an equally strong conviction of his guilt. Nor was his mind, probably, imbued with much of that religious scruple which made the idea of a feigned

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marriage so insupportable to all Hester's relations. Nor was he aware that when a man has taken a preconception home to himself, and fastened it and fixed it, as it were, into his bosom, he cannot easily expel it, —even though personal interest should be on the side of such expulsion. It had become a settled belief with the Boltons that John Caldigate was a bigamist, which belief had certainly been strengthened by the pertinacious hostility of Hester's mother. Dick had heard something of all this, and thought that he would be able to open their eyes.

When he arrived at Folking he was received with open arms. Sir John Joram had not quite liked him, because his manner had been rough. Mr. Seely had regarded him from the first as a ruined man, and therefore a willing perjurer. Even at Pollington his "bush" manners had been a little distasteful to all except his mother. Mr. Caldigate felt some difficulty in making conversation with him. But to Hester he was as an angel from heaven. She was never tired of hearing from him every detail as to her husband's life at Ahalala and Nobble,—particularly as to his life after Euphemia Smith had taken herself to those parts and had quarrelled with him. The fact of the early infatuation had been acknowledged on all sides. Hester was able to refer to that as a mother, boasting of her child's health, may refer to the measles,—which have been bad and are past and gone. Euphemia Smith had been her husband's measles. Men generally have the measles. That was a thing so completely acknowledged, that it was not now the source of discomfort. And the disease had been very bad with him. So bad that he had talked of marriage,—had promised marriage. Crafty women do get hold of innocent men, and drive

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them sometimes into perdition,—often to the brink of perdition. That was Hester's theory as to her husband. He had been on the brink, but had been wise in time. That was her creed, and as it was supported by Dick, she found no fault with Dick's manner,—not even with the yellow trousers which were brought into use at Folking.

"You were with him on that very day," she said. This referred to the day in April on which it had been sworn that the marriage was solemnised.

"I was with him every day about that time. I can't say about particular days. The truth is,—I don't mind telling you, Mrs. Caldigate,—I was drinking a good deal just then." His present state of abstinence had of course become known at Folking, not without the expression of much marvel on the part of the old Squire as to the quantity of tea which their visitor was able to swallow. And as this abstinence had of course been admired, Dick had fallen into a way of confessing his past backslidings to a pretty, sympathetic, friendly woman, who was willing to believe all that he said, and to make much of him.

"But I suppose——" Then she hesitated; and Dick understood the hesitation.

"I was never so bad," said he, "but what I knew very well what was going on. I don't believe Caldigate and Mrs. Smith even so much as spoke to each other all that month. She had had a wonderful turn of luck."

"In getting gold?"

"She had bought and sold shares till she was supposed to have made a pot of money. People up there got an idea that she was one of the lucky ones,—and it did seem so. Then she got it into her head that she

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didn't want Caldigate to know about her money, and he was downright sick of her. She had been good-looking at one time, Mrs. Caldigate."

"I daresay. Most of them are so, I suppose."

"And clever. She'd talk the hind-legs off a dog, as we used to say out there."

"You had very odd sayings, Mr. Shand."

"Indeed we had. But when she got in that way about her money, and then took to drinking brandy, Caldigate was only too glad to be rid of her. Crinkett believed in her because she had such a run of luck. She held a lot of his shares,—shares that used to be his. So they got together, and she left Ahalala and went to Polyeuka Hall. I remember it all as if it were yesterday. When I broke away from Caldigate in June, and went to Queensland, they hadn't seen each other for two months. And as for having been married;—you might as well tell me that I had married her!"

If Mr. Caldigate had ever allowed a shade of doubt to cross his mind as to his son's story, Dick Shand's further story removed it. The picture of the life which was led at Ahalala and Nobble was painted for him clearly, so that he could see, or fancy that he saw, what the condition of things had been. And this increased faith trickled through to others. Mr. Bromley, who had always believed, believed more firmly than before, and sent tidings of his belief to Plum-cum-Pippins, and thence to Babington. Mr. Holt, the farmer, became more than ever energetic, and in a loud voice at a Cambridge market ordinary, declared the ill-usage done to Caldigate and his young wife. It had been said over and over again at the trial that Dick Shand's evidence was the one thing wanted, and here was Dick

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Shand to give his evidence. Then the belief gained ground in Cambridge; and with the belief there arose a feeling as to the egregious wrong which was being done.

But the Boltons were still assured. None of them had as yet given any sign of yielding. Robert Bolton knew very well that Shand was at Folking, but had not asked to see him. He and Mr. Seely were on different sides, and could not discuss the matter; but their ideas were the same. It was incredible to Robert that Dick Shand should appear just at this moment, unless as part of an arranged plan. He could not read the whole plot; but was sure that there was a plot. It was held in his mind as a certain fact, that John Caldigate would not have paid away that large sum of money had he not thought that by doing so he was buying off Crinkett and the other witnesses. Of course there had been a marriage in Australia, and therefore the arrival of Dick Shand was to him only a lifting of the curtain for another act of the play. An attempt was to be made to get Caldigate out of prison, which attempt it was his duty to oppose. Caldigate had, he thought, deceived and inflicted a terrible stain on his family; and therefore Caldigate was an enemy upon whom it behoved him to be revenged. This feeling was the stronger in his bosom because Caldigate had been brought into the family by him.

But when Dick Shand called upon him at his office, he would not deny himself. "I have been told by some people that, as I am here in the neighbourhood, I ought to come and speak to you," said Dick. The "some people" had been, in the first instance, Mr. Ralph Holt, the farmer. But Dick had discussed the matter with Mr. Bromley, and Mr. Bromley had thought

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that Shand's story should be told direct to Hester's brother.

"If you have anything to say, Mr. Shand, I am ready to hear it."

"All this about a marriage at Ahalala between John Caldigate and Mrs. Smith is a got-up plan, Mr. Bolton."

"The jury did not seem to think so, Mr. Shand."

"I wasn't here then to let them know the truth." Robert Bolton raised his eyebrows, marvelling at the simplicity of the man who could fancy that his single word would be able to weigh down the weight of evidence which had sufficed to persuade twelve men and such a judge as Judge Bramber. "I was with Caldigate all the time, and I'm sure of what I'm saying. The two weren't on speaking terms when they were said to be married."

"Of course, Mr. Shand, as you have come to me, I will hear what you may have to say. But what is the use of it? The man has been tried and found guilty."

"They can let him out again if he's innocent."

"The Queen can pardon him, no doubt;—but even the Queen cannot quash the conviction. The evidence was as clear as noonday. The judge and the jury and the public were all in one mind."

"But I wasn't here, then," said Dick Shand, with perfect confidence. Robert Bolton could only look at him and raise his eyebrows. He could not tell him to his face that no unprejudiced person would believe the evidence of such a witness. "He's your brother-in-law," said Dick, "and I supposed you'd be glad to know that he was innocent."

"I can't go into that question, Mr. Shand. As I believe him to have been guilty of as wicked a crime as

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any man can well commit, I cannot concern myself in asking for a pardon for him. My own impression is that he should have been sent to penal servitude."

"By George!" exclaimed Dick. "I tell you that it is all a lie from beginning to end."

"I fear we cannot do any good by talking about it, Mr. Shand."

"By George!" Dick hitched up his yellow trousers as though he were preparing for a fight. He wore his yellow trousers without braces, and in all moments of energy hitched them up.

"If you please I will say good-morning to you."

"By George! when I tell you that I was there all the time, and that Caldigate never spoke to the woman, or so much as saw her all that month, and that therefore your own sister is in honest truth Caldigate's wife, you won't listen to me! Do you mean to say that I'm lying?"

"Mr. Shand, I must ask you to leave my office."

"By George! I wish I had you, Mr. Bolton, out at Ahalala, where there are not quite so many policemen as there are here at Cambridge."

"I shall have to send for one of them if you don't go away, Mr. Shand."

"Here's a man who, even for the sake of his own sister, won't hear the truth, just because he hates his sister's husband! What have I got to get by lying?"

"That I cannot tell." Bolton, as he said this, prepared himself for a sudden attack; but Shand had sense enough to know that he would injure the cause in which he was interested, as well as himself, by any exhibition of violence, and therefore left the office.

"No," said Mr. Bromley, when all this was told

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him; "he is not a cruel man, nor dishonest, nor even untrue to his sister. But having quite made up his mind that Caldigate had been married in Australia, he cannot release himself from the idea. And, as he thinks so, he feels it to be his duty to keep his sister and Caldigate apart."

"But why does he not believe me?" demanded Dick.

"In answer to that, I can only say that I do believe you."

Then there came a request from Babington that Dick Shand would go over to them there for a day. At Babington opinion was divided. Aunt Polly and her eldest daughter, and with them Mr. Smirkie, still thought that John Caldigate was a wicked bigamist; but the Squire and the rest of the family had gradually gone over to the other side. The Squire had never been hot against the offender, having been one of those who fancied that a marriage at a very out-of-the-way place such as Ahalala did not signify much. And now when he heard of Dick Shand's return and proffered evidence, he declared that Dick Shand having been born a gentleman, though he had been ever so much a sinner, and ever so much a drunkard, was entitled to credence before a host of Crinketts. But with Aunt Polly and Julia there remained the sense of the old injury, robbing Shand of all his attributes of birth, and endowing even Crinkett with truth. Then there had been a few words, and the Squire had asserted himself, and insisted upon asking Shand to Babington.

"Did you ever see such trousers?" said Julia to her mother. "I would not believe him on his oath."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Smirkie, who of the three was by far the most vehement in his adherence to the verdict. "The man is a notorious drunkard. And he

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has that look of wildness which bad characters always bring with them from the colonies."

"He didn't drink anything but water at lunch," said one of the younger girls.

"They never do when they're eating," said Mr. Smirkie. For the great teetotal triumph had not as yet been made known to the family at Babington. "These regular drunkards take it at all times by themselves, in their own rooms. He has delirium tremens in his face. I don't believe a word that he says."

"He certainly does wear the oddest trousers I ever saw," said Aunt Polly.

At the same time Dick himself was closeted with the Squire, and was convincing him that there had been no Australian marriage at all. "They didn't jump over a broomstick, or anything of that kind?" asked the Squire, intending to be jocose.

"They did nothing at all," said Dick, who had worked himself up to a state of great earnestness. "Caldigate wouldn't as much as look at her at that time;—and then to come home here and find him in prison because he had married her! How anyone should have believed it!"

"They did believe it. The women here believe it now, as you perceive."

"It's an awful shame, Mr. Babington. Think of her, Mr. Babington. It's harder on her even than him, for he was,—well, fond of the woman once."

"It is hard. But we must do what we can to get him out. I'll write to our member. Sir George supports the Government, and I'll get him to see the Secretary. It is hard upon a young fellow just when he has got married and come into a nice property."

"And her, Mr. Babington!"

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"Very bad, indeed. I'll see Sir George myself. The odd part of it is, the Boltons are all against him. Old Bolton never quite liked the marriage, and his wife is a regular Tartar."

Thus the Squire was gained, and the younger daughter. But Mr. Smirkie was as obdurate as ever. Something of his ground was cut from under his feet when Dick's new and peculiar habits were observed at dinner. Mr. Smirkie did indeed cling to his doctrine that your real drunkard never drinks at his meals; but when Dick, on being pressed in regard to wine, apologised by saying that he had become so used to tea in the colonies as not to be able to take anything else at dinner, the peculiarity was discussed till he was driven to own that he had drank nothing stronger for the last two years. Then it became plain that delirium tremens was not written on his face quite so plainly as Mr. Smirkie had at first thought, and there was nothing left but his trousers to condemn him. But Mr. Smirkie was still confident. "I don't think you can go beyond the verdict," he said. "There may be a pardon, of course;—though I shall never believe it till I see it. But though there were twenty pardons she ought not to go back to him. The pardon does not alter the crime,—and whether he was married in Australia, or whether he was not, she ought to think that he was, because the jury has said so. If she had any feeling of feminine propriety she would shut herself up and call herself Miss Bolton."

"I don't agree with you in the least," said the Squire; "and I hope I may live to see a dozen little Caldigates running about on that lawn."

And there were a few words upstairs on the subject between Mr. Smirkie and his wife,—for even Mrs.

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Smirkie and Aunt Polly at last submitted themselves to Dick's energy. "Indeed, then, if he comes out," said the wife, "I shall be very glad to see him at Plum-cum-Pippins." This was said in a voice which did not admit of contradiction, and was evidence at any rate that Dick's visit to Babington had been successful in spite of the yellow trousers.

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CHAPTER XX

THE FORTUNES OF BAGWAX

An altogether new idea had occurred to Bagwax as he sat in his office after his interview with Sir John Joram;—and it was an idea of such a nature that he thought that he saw his way quite plain to a complete manifestation of the innocence of Caldigate, to a certainty of a pardon, and to an immediate end of the whole complication. By a sudden glance at the evidence his eye had caught an object which in all his glances he had never before observed. Then at once he went to work, and finding that certain little marks were distinctly legible, he became on a sudden violently hot,—so that the sweat broke out on his forehead. Here was the whole thing disclosed at once,—disclosed to all the world if he chose to disclose it. But if he did so, then there could not be any need for that journey to Sydney, which Sir John still thought to be expedient. And this thing which he had now seen was not one within his own branch of work,—was not a matter with which he was bound to be conversant. Somebody else ought to have found it out. His own knowledge was purely accidental. There would be no disgrace to him in not finding it out. But he had found it out.

Bagwax was a man who, in his official zeal and official capacity, had exercised his intellect far beyond

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the matters to which he was bound to apply himself in the mere performance of his duties. Post-marks were his business; and had he given all his mind to post-marks, he would have sufficiently carried out that great doctrine of doing the duty which England expects from every man. But he had travelled beyond post-marks, and had looked into many things. Among other matters he had looked into penny stamps, twopenny stamps, and other stamps. In post-office phraseology there is sometimes a confusion because the affixed effigy of her Majesty's head, which represents the postage paid, is called a stamp, and the post-marks or impressions indicating the names of towns are also called stamps. Those post-marks or impressions had been the work of Bagwax's life; but his zeal, his joy in his office, and the general energy of his disposition, had opened up to him also all the mysteries of the queen's-heads. That stamp, that effigy, that twopenny queen's-head, which by its presence on the corner of the envelope purported to have been the price of conveying the letter from Sydney to Nobble, on 10th May, 1873, had certainly been manufactured and sent out to the colony since that date!

There are signs invisible to ordinary eyes which are plain as the sun at noonday to the initiated. It is so in all arts, in all sciences. Bagwax was at once sure of his fact. To his instructed gaze the little receipt for twopence was as clearly dated as though the figures were written on it. And yet he had never looked at it before. In the absorbing interest which the post-mark had created,—that fraudulent post-mark, as it certainly was,—he had never condescended to examine the post-age-stamp. But now he saw and was certain.

If it was so,—and he had no doubt,—then would Cal-

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digate surely be released. It is hoped that the reader will follow the mind of Bagwax, which was in this matter very clear. This envelope had been brought up at the trial as evidence that, on a certain day, Caldigate had written to the woman as his wife, and had sent the letter through the post-office. For such sending the postage-stamp was necessary. The postage-stamp had certainly been put on when the envelope was prepared for its intended purpose. But if it could be proved by the stamp itself that it had not been in existence on the date impressed on the envelope, then the fraud would be quite apparent. And if there had been such fraud, then would the testimony of all those four witnesses be crushed into arrant perjury. They had produced the fraudulent document, and by it would be thoroughly condemned. There could be no necessity for a journey to Sydney.

As it all became clear to his mind, he thumped his table partly in triumph,—partly in despair. "What's the matter with you now?" said Mr. Curlydown. It was a quarter past four, and Curlydown had not completed his daily inspections. Had Bagwax been doing his proper share of work, Curlydown would have already washed his hands and changed his coat, and have been ready to start for the 4.30 train. As it was, he had an hour of labour before him, and would be unable to count the plums upon his wall, as was usual with him before dinner.

"It becomes more wonderful every day," said Bagwax, solemnly,—almost awfully.

"It is very wonderful to me that a man should be able to sit so many hours looking at one dirty bit of paper."

"Every moment that I pass with that envelope be-

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fore my eyes I see the innocent husband in jail, and the poor afflicted wife weeping in her solitude."

"You'll be going on the stage, Bagwax, before this is done."

"I have sometimes thought that it was the career for which I was best adapted. But, as to the envelope, the facts are now certain."

"Any new facts?" asked Curlydown. But he asked the question in a jeering tone, not at all as though desiring confidence or offering sympathy.

"Yes," replied Bagwax, slowly. "The facts are certainly new,—and most convincing; but as you have not given attention to the particular branch concerned, there can be no good in my mentioning them. You would not understand me." It was thus that he revenged himself on Curlydown. Then there was again silence between them for a quarter of an hour, during which Curlydown was hurrying through his work, and Bagwax was meditating whether it was certainly his duty to make known the facts as to the postage-stamp. "You are so unkind," said Bagwax at last, in a tone of injured friendship, burning to tell his new discovery.

"You have got it all your way," said Curlydown, without lifting his head. "And then, as you said just now,—I don't understand."

"I'd tell you everything if you'd only be a little less hard."

Curlydown was envious. He had, of course, been told of the civil things which Sir John Joram had said; and though he did not quite believe all, he was convinced that Bagwax was supposed to have distinguished himself. If there was anything to be known he would like to know it. Nor was he naturally quarrelsome.

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Bagwax was his old friend. "I don't mean to be hard," he said. "Of course one does feel oneself fretted when one has been obliged to miss two trains."

"Can I lend a hand?" said Bagwax.

"It doesn't signify now. I can't catch anything before the 5.20. One does expect to get away a little earlier than that on a Saturday. What is it that you've found out?"

"Do you really care to know?"

"Of course I do,—if it's anything in earnest. I took quite as much interest as you in the matter when we were down at Cambridge."

"You see that postage-stamp?" Bagwax stretched out the envelope,—or rather the photograph of the envelope, for it was no more. But the Queen's head, with all its obliterating smudges, and all its marks and peculiarities, was to be seen quite as plainly as on the original, which was tied up carefully among the archives of the trial. "You see that postage-stamp?" Curlydown took his glass, and looked at the document, and declared that he saw the postage-stamp very plainly.

"But it does not tell you anything particular?"

"Nothing very particular—at the first glance," said Curlydown, gazing through the glass with all his eyes.

"Look again."

"I see that they obliterate out there with a kind of star."

"That has nothing to do with it."

"The bunch of hair at the back of the head isn't quite like our bunch of hair."

"Just the same;—taken from the same die," said Bagwax.

"The little holes for dividing the stamps are bigger."

"It isn't that."

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"Then what the d—— is it?"

"There are letters at every corner," said Bagwax.

"That's of course," said Curlydown.

"Can you read those letters?" Curlydown owned that he never had quite understood what those letters meant. "Those two P's in the two bottom corners tell me that that stamp wasn't printed before '74. It was all explained to me not long ago. Now the post-mark is dated '73." There was an air of triumph about Bagwax as he said this which almost drove Curlydown back to hostility. But he checked himself, merely shaking his head, and continued to look at the stamp. "What do you think of that?" asked Bagwax.

"You'd have to prove it."

"Of course I should. But the stamps are made here and are sent out to the colony. I shall see Smithers at the stamp-office on Monday of course." Mr. Smithers was a gentleman concerned in the manufacture of stamps. "But I know my facts. I am as well aware of the meaning of those letters as though I had made the postage-stamp my own peculiar duty. Now what ought I to do?"

"You wouldn't have to go, I suppose?"

"Not a foot."

"And yet it ought to be found out how that date got there." And Curlydown put his finger upon the impression—10th May, 1873.

"Not a doubt about it. I should do a deal of good by going if they'd give me proper authority to overhaul everything in the office out there. They had the letter stamped fraudulently;—fraudulently, Mr. Curlydown! Perhaps if I stayed at home to give evidence, they'd send you to Sydney to find all that out."

There was a courtesy in this suggestion which in-

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duced Curlydown to ask his junior to come down and take pot-luck at Apricot Villa. Bagwax was delighted, for his heart had been sore at the coolness which had grown up between him and the man under whose wing he had worked for so many years. He had been devoted to Curlydown till growing ambition had taught him to think himself able to strike out a line for himself. Mr. Curlydown had two daughters, of whom the younger, Jemima, had found much favour in the eyes of Bagwax. But since the jealousy had sprung up between the two men he had never seen Jemima, nor tasted the fruits of Curlydown's garden. Mrs. Curlydown, who approved of Bagwax, had been angry, and Jemima herself had become sullen and unloving to her father. On that very morning Mrs. Curlydown had declared that she hated quarrels like poison. "So do I, mamma," said Jemima, breaking her silence emphatically. "Not that Mr. Bagwax is anything to anybody."

"That does look like something," said Curlydown, whispering to his friend in the railway carriage. They were sitting opposite to each other, with their knees together,—and were of course discussing the envelope.

"It is everything. When they were making up their case in Australia, and when the woman brought out the cover with his writing upon it, with the very name, Mrs. Caldigate, written by himself,—Crinkett wasn't contented with that. So they put their heads together, and said that if the letter could be got to look like a posted letter,—a letter sent regularly by the post,—that would be real evidence. The idea wasn't bad."

"Nothing has ever been considered better evidence than post-marks," said Curlydown, with authority.

"It was a good idea. Then they had to get a post-

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age-stamp. They little knew how they might put their foot into it there. And they got hold of some young man at the post-office who knew how to fix a date-stamp with a past date. How these things become clear when one looks at them long enough!"

"Only one has to have an eye in one's head."

"Yes," said Bagwax, as modestly as he could at such a moment. "A fellow has to have his wits about him before he can do anything out of the common way in any line. You'd tell Sir John everything at once;—wouldn't you?" Curlydown raised his hat and scratched his head. "Duty first, you know. Duty first," said Bagwax.

"In a man's own line,—yes," said Curlydown. "Somebody else ought to have found that out. That's not post-office. It's stamps and taxes. It's very hard that a man should have to cut the nose off his own face by knowing more than he need know."

"Duty! Duty!" said Bagwax as he opened the carriage-door and jumped out on to the platform.

When he got up to the cottage, Mrs. Curlydown assured him that it was quite a cure for sore eyes to see him. Sophia, the eldest of the two daughters at home, told him that he was a false truant; and Jemima surmised that the great attractions of the London season had prevented him from coming down to Enfield. "It isn't that, indeed," he said. "I am always delighted in running down. But the Caldigate affair has been so important!"

"You mean the trial," said Mrs. Curlydown. "But the man has been in prison ever so long."

"Unjustly! Most unjustly!"

"Is it so, really?" asked Jemima. "And the poor young bride?"

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"Not so much of a bride," said Sophia. "She's got one, I know."

"And papa says you're to go out to Botany Bay," said Jemima. "It'll be years and years before you are back again." Then he explained it was not Botany Bay, and he would be back in six months. And, after all, he wasn't going at all. "Well, I declare, if papa isn't down the walk already," said Jemima, looking out of the window.

"I don't think I shall go at all," said Bagwax in a melancholy tone as he went upstairs to wash his hands.

The dinner was very pleasant; and as Curlydown and his guest drank their bottle of port together at the open window, it was definitely settled that Bagwax should reveal the mystery of the postage-stamp to Sir John Joram at once. "I should have it like a lump of lead on my conscience all the time I was on the deep," said Bagwax, solemnly.

"Conscience is conscience, to be sure," said Curlydown.

"I don't think that I'm given to be afraid," said Bagwax. "The ocean, if I know myself, would have no terrors for me;—not if I was doing my duty. But I should hear the ship's sides cracking with every blast if that secret were lodged within my breast."

"Take another glass of port, old boy,"

Bagwax did take another glass, finishing the bottle, and continued. "Farewell to those smiling shores. Farewell, Sydney, and all her charms. Farewell to her orange groves, her blue mountains, and her rich gold fields."

"Take a drop of whitewash to wind up, and then we'll join the ladies." Curlydown was a strictly hospitable man, and in his own house would not appear to

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take amiss anything his guest might say. But when Bagwax become too poetical over his wine, Curlydown waxed impatient. Bagwax took his drop of whitewash, and then hurried on to the lawn to join Jemima.

"And you really are not going to those distant parts?"

"No," said Bagwax, with all that melancholy which wine and love combined with sorrow can produce. "That dream is over."

"I am so glad."

"Why should you be glad? Why should a resolve which it almost breaks my heart to make be a source of joy to you?"

"Of course you would have nothing to regret at leaving, Mr. Bagwax."

"Very much,—if I were going forever. No;—I could never do that, unless I were to take some dear one with me. But, as I said, that dream is over. It has ever been my desire to see foreign climes, and the chance so seldom comes in a man's way."

"You've been to Ostend, I know, Mr. Bagwax."

"Oh yes, and to Boulogne," said Bagwax, proudly. "But the desire of travel grows with the thing it feeds on. I long to overcome great distances,—to feel that I have put illimitable space behind me. To set my foot on shores divided from these by the thickness of all the earth would give me a sense of grandeur which I—which,—which,—would be magnificent."

"I suppose that is natural in a man."

"In some men," said Bagwax, not liking to be told that his heroic instincts were shared by all his brethren.

"But women of course think of the dangers. Suppose you were to be cast away!"

"What matter? With a father of a family of course

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it would be different. But a lone man should never think of such things." Jemima shook her head and walked silently by his side. "If I had some dear one who cared for me I suppose it would be different with me."

"I don't know," said Jemima. "Gentlemen like to amuse themselves sometimes, but it doesn't often go very deep."

"Things always go deep with me," said Bagwax. "I panted for that journey to the Antipodes;—panted for it! Now that it is over, perhaps some day I may tell you under what circumstances it has been relinquished. In the meantime my mind passes to other things; or perhaps I should say my heart—Jemima!" Then Bagwax stopped on the path.

"Go on, Mr. Bagwax. Papa will be looking at you."

"Jemima," he said, "will you recompense me by your love for what I have lost on the other side of the globe?" She recompensed him, and he was happy.

The future father and son-in-law sat and discussed their joint affairs for an hour after the ladies had retired. As to Jemima and his love, Bagwax was allowed to be altogether triumphant. Mrs. Curlydown kissed him, and he kissed Sophia. That was in public. What passed between him and Jemima, no human eye saw. The old post-office clerk took the younger one to his heart, and declared that he was perfectly satisfied with his girl's choice. "I've always known that you were steady," he said, "and that's what I look to. She has had her admirers, and perhaps might have looked higher; but what's rank or money if a man's fond of pleasure?" But when that was settled they returned again to the Caldigate envelope. Curlydown was not quite so sure as to that question of duty. The proposed

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journey to Sydney, with a pound a-day allowed for expenses, and the traveller's salary going on all the time, would put a nice sum of ready money into Bagwax's pocket. "It wouldn't be less than two hundred towards furnishing, my boy," said Curlydown. "You'll want it. And as for the delay, what's six months? Girls like to have a little time to boast about it."

But Bagwax had made up his mind, and nothing would shake him. "If they'll let me go out all the same, to set matters right, of course I'd take the job. I should think it a duty, and would bear the delay as well as I could. If Jemima thought it right I'm sure she wouldn't complain. But since I saw that letter on that stamp my conscience has told me that I must reveal it all. It might be me as was in prison, and Jemima who was told that I had a wife in Australia. Since I've looked at it in that light I've been more determined than ever to go to Sir John Joram's chambers on Monday. Good-night, Mr. Curlydown. I am very glad you asked me down to the cottage to-day; more glad than anything."

At half-past eleven, by the last train, Bagwax returned to town, and spent the night with mingled dreams, in which Sydney, Jemima, and the envelope were all in their turns eluding him, and all in their turns within his grasp.

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CHAPTER XXI

SIR JOHN BACKS HIS OPINION

"WELL, Mr. Bagwax, I'm glad that it's only one envelope this time." This was said by Sir John Joram to the honest and energetic post-office clerk on the morning of Wednesday the 3d September, when the lawyer would have been among the partridges down in Suffolk but for the vicissitudes of John Caldigate's case. It was hard upon Sir John, and went something against the grain with him. He was past the time of life at which men are enthusiastic as to the wrongs of others, —as was Bagwax; and had, in truth, much less to gain from the cause, or to expect, than Bagwax. He thought that the pertinacity of Bagwax, and the coming of Dick Shand at the moment of his holidays, were circumstances which justified the use of a little internal strong language,—such as he had occasionally used externally before he had become attorney-general. In fact he had—damned Dick Shand and Bagwax, and in doing so had considered that Jones his clerk was internal. "I wish he had gone to Sydney a month ago," he said to Jones. But when Jones suggested that Bagwax might be sent to Sydney without further trouble, Sir John's conscience pricked him. Not to be able to shoot a Suffolk partridge on the 1st of September was very cruel, but to be detained wrongfully in Cambridge jail was worse; and he was of opinion that such cruelty had been inflicted on Caldigate. On the Saturday Dick

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Shand had been with him. He had remained in town on the Monday and Tuesday by agreement with Mr. Seely. Early on the Tuesday intimation was given to him that Bagwax would come on the Wednesday with further evidence,—with evidence which should be positively conclusive. Bagwax had, in the mean time, been with his friend Smithers at the stamp-office, and was now fully prepared. By the help of Smithers he had arrived at the fact that the postage-stamp had certainly been fabricated in 1874, some months after the date imprinted on the cover of the letter to which it was affixed.

"No, Sir John;—only one this time. We needn't move anything." All the chaos had been restored to its normal place, and looked as though it had never been moved since it was collected.

"And we can prove that this Queen's head did not exist before the 1st January, 1874."

"Here's the deposition," said Bagwax, who, by his frequent intercourse with Mr. Jones, had become almost as good as a lawyer himself,—"at least, it isn't a deposition, of course,—because it's not sworn."

"A statement of what can be proved on oath."

"Just that, Sir John. It's Mr. Smithers'! Mr. Smithers has been at the work for the last twenty years. I knew it just as well as he from the first, because I attend to these sort of things; but I thought it best to go to the fountain-head."

"Quite right."

"Sir John will want to hear it from the fountain-head, I said to myself; and therefore I went to Smithers. Smithers is perhaps a little conceited, but his word is—gospel. In a matter of postage-stamps Smithers is gospel."

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Then Sir John read the statement; and though he may not have taken it for gospel, still to him it was credible. "It seems clear," he said.

"Clear as the running stream," said Bagwax.

"I should like to have all that gang up for perjury, Mr. Bagwax."

"So should I, Sir John;—so should I. When I think of that poor dear lady and her infant babe without a name, and that young father torn from his paternal acres and cast into a vile prison, my blood boils within my veins, and all my passion to see foreign climes fades into the distance."

"No foreign climes now, Mr. Bagwax."

"I suppose not, Sir John," said the hero, mournfully.

"Not if this be true."

"It's gospel, Sir John;—gospel. They might send me out to set that office to rights. Things must be very wrong when they could get hold of a date-stamp and use it in that way. There must be one of the gang in the office."

"A bribe did it, I should say."

"I could find it out, Sir John. Let me alone for that. You could say that you have found me—quick-like, in this matter;—couldn't you, Sir John?" Bagwax was truly happy in the love of Jemima Curlydown; but that idea of earning two hundred pounds for furniture, and of seeing distant climes at the same time, had taken a strong hold of his imagination.

"I am afraid I should have no voice in the matter,—unless with the view of getting evidence."

"And we've got that;—haven't we, Sir John?"

"I think so."

"Duty, Sir John, duty!" said Bagwax, almost sobbing through his triumph.

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"That's it, Mr. Bagwax." Sir John too had given up his partridges,—for a day or two.

"And that gentleman will now be restored to his wife?"

"It isn't for me to say. As you and I have been engaged on the same side——" To be told that he had been on the same side with the late attorney-general was almost compensation to Bagwax for the loss of his journey. "As you and I have been on the same side, I don't mind telling you that I think that he ought to be released. The matter remains with the Secretary of State, who will probably be guided by the judge who tried the case."

"A stern man, Sir John."

"Not soft-hearted, Mr. Bagwax,—but as conscientious a man as you'll be able to put your hand upon. The young wife with her nameless baby won't move him at all. But were he moved by such consideration, he would be so far unfit for his office."

"Mercy is divine," said Bagwax.

"And therefore unfit to be used by a merely human judge. You know, I suppose, that Richard Shand has come home?"

"No!"

"Indeed he has, and was with me a day or two since."

"Can he say anything?" Bagwax was not rejoiced at Dick's opportune return. He thoroughly wished that Caldigate should be liberated, but he wished himself to monopolise the glory of the work.

"He says a great deal. He has sworn point-blank that there was no such marriage at the time named. He and Caldigate were living together then, and for some weeks afterwards, and the woman was never near them during the time."

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"To think of his coming just now!"

"It will be a great help, Mr. Bagwax; but it wouldn't be enough alone. He might possibly—tell an untruth."

"Perjury on the other side, as it were."

"Just that. But this little Queen's-head here can't be untrue."

"No, Sir John, no; that can't be," said Bagwax, comforted; "and the dated impression can't lie either. The envelope is what'll do it after all."

"I hope so. You and Mr. Jones will prepare the statement for the Secretary of State, and I will send it myself." With that Mr. Bagwax took his leave, and remained closeted with Mr. Jones for much of the remainder of the day.

The moment Sir John was alone he wrote an almost angry note to his friend Honybun, in conjunction with whom and another Member of Parliament he had the shooting in Suffolk. Honybun, who was also a lawyer, though less successful than his friend, was a much better shot, and was already taking the cream off the milk of the shooting. "I cannot conceive," he said at the end of his letter, "that, after all my experience, I should have put myself so much out of my way to serve a client. A man should do what he's paid to do, and what it is presumed that he will do, and nothing more. But here I have been instigated by an insane ambition to emulate the good-natured zeal of a fellow who is absolutely willing to sacrifice himself for the good of a stranger." Then he went on to say that he could not leave London till the Friday.

On the Thursday morning he put all the details together, and himself drew out a paper for the perusal of the Secretary of State. As he looked at the matter

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all around, it seemed to him that the question was so clear that even Judge Bramber could not hesitate. The evidence of Dick Shand was quite conclusive,—if credible. It was open, of course, to strong doubt, in that it could not be sifted by cross-examination. Alone, it certainly would not have sufficed to extort a pardon from any Secretary of State,—as any Secretary of State would have been alive to the fact that Dick might have been suborned. Dick's life had not been such that his single word would have been regarded as certainly true. But in corroboration it was worth much. And then if the Secretary or the judge could be got to go into that very complicated question of the dated stamp, it would, Sir John thought, become evident to him that the impression had not been made at the time indicated. This had gradually been borne in upon Sir John's mind, till he was almost as confident in his facts as Bagwax himself. But this operation had required much time and much attention. Would the Secretary, or would the judge, clear his table, and give himself time to inspect and to measure two or three hundred postmarks? The date of the fabrication of the postage-stamp would of course require to be verified by official report;—but if the facts as stated by Bagwax were thus confirmed, then the fraudulent nature of the envelope would be put beyond doubt. It would be so manifest that this morsel of evidence had been falsely concocted, that no clear-headed man, let his prepossessions be what they might, could doubt it. Judge Bramber would no doubt begin to sift the case with a strong bias in favour of the jury. It was for a jury to ascertain the facts; and in this case the jury had done so. In his opinion,—in Judge Bramber's opinion, as the judge had often declared it,—a judge should not be required to determine

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facts. A new trial, were that possible, would be the proper remedy, if remedy were wanted; but as that was impossible, he would be driven to investigate such new evidence as was brought before him, and to pronounce what would, in truth, be another verdict. All this was clear to Sir John; and he told himself that even Judge Bramber would not be able to deny that false evidence had been submitted to the jury.

Sir John, as he occupied his mind with the matter on the Thursday morning, did wake himself up to some generous energy on his client's behalf,—so that in sending the written statements of the case to the Home Secretary, he himself wrote a short but strongly-worded note. "As it is quite manifest," he said, "that a certain amount of false and fraudulent circumstantial evidence has been brought into court by the witnesses who proved the alleged marriage, and as direct evidence has now come to hand on the other side which is very clear, and as far as we know trustworthy, I feel myself justified in demanding her Majesty's pardon for my client."

On the next day he went down to Birdseye Lodge, near Ipswich, and was quite enthusiastic on the matter with his friend Honybun. "I never knew Bramber go beyond a jury in my life," said Honybun.

"He'll have to do it now. They can't keep him in prison when they find that the chief witness was manifestly perjured. The woman swore on her oath that the letter reached her by post in May, 1873. It certainly did not do so. The cover, as we see it, has been fabricated since that date."

"I never thought the cover went for much," said Honybun.

"For very little,—for nothing at all perhaps,—till proved to be fraudulent. If they had left the letter

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alone their case would have been strong enough for a conviction. As it was, they were fools enough to go into a business of this sort; but they have done so, and as they have been found out, the falsehood which has been detected covers every word of their spoken evidence with suspicion. It will be like losing so much of his heart's blood, but the old fellow will have to give way."

"He never gave way in his life."

"We'll make him begin."

"I'll bet you a pony he don't."

"I'll take the bet," said the late Attorney-General. But as he did so he looked round to see that not even a gamekeeper was near enough to hear him.

On that Friday Bagwax was in a very melancholy state of mind at his office, in spite of the brilliancy of his prospects with Miss Curlydown. "I'll just come back to my old work," he said to his future father-in-law. "There's nothing else for me to do."

This was all as it should be, and would have been regarded a day or two ago by Curlydown as simple justice. There had been quite enough of that pottering over an old envelope, to the manifest inconvenience of himself and others. But now the matter was altered. His was a paternal and an affectionate heart, and he saw very plainly the pecuniary advantage of a journey to Sydney. And he knew too that, in official life as well as elsewhere, to those who have much, more is given. Now that Bagwax was to him in the light of a son, he wished Bagwax to rise in the world. "I wouldn't give it up," said he.

"But what would you do?"

"I'd stick to it like wax till they did something for me."

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"There's nothing to stick to."

"I'd take it for granted I was going at once to Sydney. I'd get my outfit, and, by George! I'd take my place."

"I've told Sir John I wasn't going; and he said it wasn't necessary." As Bagwax told his sad tale he almost wept.

"I wouldn't mind that. I'd have it out of them somehow. Why is he to have all the pay? No doubt it's been hundreds to him; and you've done the work and got nothing."

"When I asked him to get me sent, he said he'd no power;—not now it's all so plain." He turned his face down towards the desk to hide the tear that now was, in truth, running down his face. "But duty!" he said, looking up again. "Duty! England expects——. D——n it, who's going to whimper? When I lay my head on my pillow at night and think that I, I, Thomas Bagwax, have restored that nameless one to her babe and her lord, I shall sleep even though that pillow be no better than a hard bolster."

"Jemima will look after that," said the father, laughing. "But still I wouldn't give it up. Never give a chance up,—they come so seldom. I'll tell you what I should do;—I should apply to the Secretary for leave to go to Sydney at once."

"At my own expense?" said Bagwax, horrified.

"Certainly not;—but that you might have an opportunity of investigating all this for the public service. It'll get referred round in some way to the Secretary of State, who can't but see all that you've done. When it gets out of a man's own office he don't much mind doing a little job. It sounds good-natured. And then if they don't do anything for you, you'll get a grievance.

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Next to a sum of money down, a grievance is the best thing you can have. A man who can stick to a grievance year after year will always make money of it at last."

On the Saturday, Bagwax went down to Apricot Lodge, having been invited to stay with his beloved till the Monday. In the smiles of his beloved he did find much consolation, especially as it had already been assured to him that sixty pounds a year would be settled on Jemima on and from her wedding-day. And then they made very much of him. "You do love me, Tom; don't you?" said Jemima. They were sitting on campstools behind the grotto, and Bagwax answered by pressing the loved one's waist. "Better than going to Sydney, Tom,—don't you?"

"It is so very different," said Bagwax,—which was true.

"If you don't like me better than anything else in all the world, however different, I will never stand at the altar with you." And she moved her campstool perhaps an inch away.

"In the way of loving, of course I do."

"Then why do you grieve when you've got what you like best?"

"You don't understand, Jemima, what a spirit of adventure means."

"I think I do, or I shouldn't be going to marry you. That's quite as great an adventure as a journey to Sydney. You ought to be very glad to get off, now you're going to settle down as a married man."

"Think what two hundred pounds would be, Jemima; —in the way of furniture."

"That's papa's putting in, I know. I hate all that hankering after filthy lucre. You ought to be ashamed

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of wanting to go so far away just when you're engaged. You wouldn't care about leaving me, I suppose;—not the least."

"I should always be thinking of you."

"Yes, you would! But suppose I wasn't thinking of you. Suppose I took to thinking of somebody else. How would it be then?"

"You wouldn't do that, Jemima."

"You ought to know when you're well off, Tom." By this time he had recovered the inch and perhaps a little more. "You ought to feel that you've plenty to console you."

"So I do. Duty! duty! England expects that every man——"

"That's your idea of consolation, is it?" And away went the camp-stool half a yard.

"You believe in duty, don't you, Jemima?"

"In a husband's duty to his wife, I do;—and in a young man's duty to his sweetheart."

"And in a father's to his children."

"That's as may be," said she, getting up and walking away into the kitchen-garden. He of course accompanied her, and before they got to the house had promised her not to sigh for the delights of Sydney, nor for the perils of adventure any more.

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CHAPTER XXII

JUDGE BRAMBER

A SECRETARY OF STATE who has to look after the police and the magistrates, to answer questions in the House of Commons, and occasionally to make a telling speech in defence of his colleagues, and, in addition to this, is expected to perform the duties of a practical court of appeal in criminal cases, must have something to do. To have to decide whether or no some poor wretch shall be hanged, when, in spite of the clearest evidence, humanitarian petitions by the dozen overwhelm him with claims for mercy, must be a terrible responsibility. "No, your Majesty, I think we won't hang him. I think we'll send him to penal servitude for life;—if your Majesty pleases." That is so easy, and would be so pleasant. Why should anyone grumble at so right royal a decision? But there are the newspapers, always so prone to complain;—and the Secretary has to acknowledge that he must be strong enough to hang his culprits in spite of petitions, or else he must give up that office. But when the evidence is not clear, the case is twice more difficult. The jury have found their verdict, and the law intends that the verdict of a jury shall be conclusive. When a man has been declared to be guilty by twelve of his countrymen,—he is guilty, let the facts have been what they may, and let the twelve have been ever so much in error. Majesty, however, can pardon guilt, and hence

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arises some awkward remedy for the mistakes of jurymen. But as unassisted Majesty cannot itself investigate all things,—is not, in fact, in this country supposed to perform any duties of that sort,—a Secretary of State is invested with the privilege of what is called mercy. It is justice rather that is wanted. If Bagwax were in the right about that envelope,—and the reader will by this time think that he was right; and if Dick Shand had sworn truly, then certainly our friend John Caldigate was not in want of mercy. It was instant justice that he required,—with such compensation as might come to him from the indignant sympathy of all good men.

I remember to have seen a man at Bermuda whose fate was peculiar. He was sleek, fat, and apparently comfortable, mixing pills when I saw him, he himself a convict and administering to the wants of his brother convicts. He remonstrated with me on the hardness of his position. "Either I did do it, or I didn't," he said. "It was because they thought I didn't that they sent me here. And if I didn't, what right had they to keep me here at all?" I passed on in silence, not daring to argue the matter with the man in face of the warder. But the man was right. He had murdered his wife;—so at least the jury had said,—and had been sentenced to be hanged. He had taken the poor woman into a little island, and while she was bathing had drowned her. Her screams had been heard on the mainland, and the jury had found the evidence sufficient. Some newspaper had thought the reverse, and had mooted the question;—was not the distance too great for such screams to have been heard, or, at any rate, understood? So the man was again brought to trial in the Court of the Home Office, and was,—not

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pardoned, but sent to grow fat and make pills at Bermuda. He had, or he had not, murdered his wife. If he did the deed he should have been hanged;—and if not, he should not have been forced to make extorted pills.

What was a Secretary of State to do in such a case? No doubt he believed that the wretch had murdered his wife. No doubt the judge believed it. All the world believed it. But the newspaper was probably right in saying that the evidence was hardly conclusive,—probably right because it produced its desired effect. If the argument had been successfully used with the jury, the jury would have acquitted the man. Then surely the Secretary of State should have sent him out as though acquitted; and, not daring to hang him, should have treated him as innocent. Another trial was, in truth, demanded.

And so it was in Caldigate's case. The Secretary of State, getting up early in the morning after a remarkable speech, in which he vindicated his Ministry from the attacks of all Europe, did read all the papers, and took home to himself the great Bagwaxian theory. He mastered Dick's evidence;—and managed to master something also as to Dick's character. He quite understood the argument as to the postage-stamp,—which went further with him than the other arguments. And he understood the perplexity of his own position. If Bagwax was right, not a moment should be lost in releasing the ill-used man. To think of pardon, to mention pardon, would be an insult. Instant justice, with infinite regrets that the injuries inflicted admitted of no compensation,—that, and that only, was impressively demanded. How grossly would that man have been ill-used;—how cruelly would that woman have been in-

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jured! But then, again,—if Bagwax was wrong;—if the cunning fraud had been concocted over here and not in Sydney;—if the plot had been made, not to incarcerate an innocent man, but to liberate a guilty man, then how unfit would he show himself for his position were he to be taken in by such guile! What crime could be worse than that committed by Caldigate against the young lady he had betrayed, if Caldigate were guilty? Upon the whole, he thought it would be safer to trust to the jury; but comforted himself by the reflection that he could for a while transfer the responsibility. It would perhaps be expedient to transfer it altogether. So he sent all the papers on to Judge Bramber.

Judge Bramber was a great man. Never popular, he had been wise enough to disregard popularity. He had forced himself into practice, in opposition to the attorneys, by industry and perspicuity. He had attended exclusively to his profession, never having attempted to set his foot on the quicker stepping-stones of political life. It was said of him that no one knew whether he called himself Liberal or Conservative. At fifty-five he was put upon the bench, simply because he was supposed to possess a judicial mind. Here he amply justified that opinion,—but not without the sneer and ill-words of many. He was now seventy, and it was declared that years had had no effect on him. He was supposed to be absolutely merciless,—as hard as a nether millstone, a judge who could put on the black cap without a feeling of inward disgust. But it may be surmised that they who said so knew nothing of him,—for he was a man not apt to betray the secrets of his inner life. He was noted for his reverence for a jury, and for his silence on the bench. The older he

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grew the shorter became his charges; nor were there wanting those who declared that his conduct in this respect was intended as a reproach to some who were desirous of adorning the bench by their eloquence. To sit there listening to everything, and subordinating himself to others till his interposition was necessary, was his idea of a judge's duty. But when the law had declared itself, he was always strong in supporting the law. A man condemned for murder ought to be hanged,—so thought Judge Bramber,—and not released, in accordance with the phantasy of philanthropists. Such were the requirements of the law. If the law were cruel, let the legislators look to that. He was once heard to confess that the position of a judge who had condemned an innocent man might be hard to bear; but he added that a country would be unfortunate which did not possess judges capable of bearing even that sorrow. In his heart he disapproved of the attribute of mercy as belonging to the Crown. It was opposed to his idea of English law, and apt to do harm rather than good.

He had been quite convinced of Caldigate's guilt,—not only by the direct evidence, but by the concurrent circumstances. To his thinking, it was not in human nature that a man should pay such a sum as twenty thousand pounds to such people as Crinkett and Euphemia Smith,—a sum of money which was not due either legally or morally,—except with an improper object. I have said that he was a great man; but he did not rise to any appreciation of the motives which had unquestionably operated with Caldigate. Had Caldigate been quite assured, when he paid the money, that his enemies would remain and bear witness against him, still he would have paid it. In that matter he had en-

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deavoured to act as he would have acted had the circumstances of the mining transaction been made known to him when no threat was hanging over his head. But all that Judge Bramber did not understand. He understood, however, quite clearly, that under no circumstance should money have been paid by an accused person to witnesses while that person's guilt and innocence were in question. In his summing-up he had simply told the jury to consider the matter;—but he had so spoken the word as to make the jury fully perceive what had been the result of his own consideration.

And then Caldigate and the woman had lived together, and a distinct and repeated promise of marriage had been acknowledged. It was acknowledged that the man had given his name to the woman, so far as himself to write it. Whatever might be the facts as to the post-mark and postage-stamp, the words "Mrs. Caldigate" had been written by the man now in prison.

Four persons had given direct evidence; and in opposition to them there had been nothing. Till Dick Shand had come, no voice had been brought forward to throw even a doubt upon the marriage. That two false witnesses should adhere well together in a story was uncommon; that three should do so, most rare; with four it would be almost a miracle. But these four had adhered. They were people, probably, of bad character,—whose lives had perhaps been lawless. But if so, it would have been so much easier to prove them false if they were false. Thus Judge Bramber, when he passed sentence on Caldigate, had not in the least doubted that the verdict was a true verdict.

And now the case was sent to him for reconsideration. He hated such reconsiderations. He first read Sir John Joram's letter, and declared to himself that it

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was unfit to have come from anyone calling himself a lawyer. There was an enthusiasm about it altogether beneath a great advocate,—certainly beneath any forensic advocate employed otherwise than in addressing a jury. He, Judge Bramber, had never himself talked of "demanding" a verdict even from a jury. He had only endeavoured to win it. But that a man who had been Attorney-General,—who had been the head of the bar,—should thus write to a Secretary of State, was to him disgusting. To his thinking, a great lawyer, even a good lawyer, would be incapable of enthusiasm as to any case in which he was employed. The ignorant childish world outside would indulge in zeal and hot feelings,—but for an advocate to do so was to show that he was no lawyer,—that he was no better than the outside world. Even spoken eloquence was, in his mind, almost beneath a lawyer,—studied eloquence certainly was so. But such written words as these disgusted him. And then he came across allusions to the condition of the poor lady at Folking. What could the condition of the lady at Folking have to do with the matter? Though the poor lady at Folking should die in her sorrow, that could not alter the facts as they had occurred in Australia! It was not for him, or for the Secretary of State, to endeavour to make things pleasant all round here in England. It had been the jury's duty to find out whether that crime had been committed, and his duty to see that all due facilities were given to the jury. It had been Sir John Joram's duty to make out what best case he could for his client, —and then to rest contented. Had all things been as they should be, the Secretary of State would have had no duty at all in the matter. It was in this frame of mind that Judge Bramber applied himself to the con-

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sideration of the case. No juster man ever lived;—and yet in his mind there was a bias against the prisoner.

Nevertheless he went to his work with great patience, and a resolve to sift everything that was to be sifted. The Secretary of State had done no more than his required duty in sending the case to him, and he would now do his. He took the counter evidence as it came in the papers. In order that the two Bagwaxian theories, each founded on the same small document, might be expounded, one consecutively after the other, Dick Shand and his deposition were produced first. The judge declared to himself that Dick's single oath, which could not now be tested by cross-examination, amounted to nothing. He had been a drunkard and a pauper,—had descended to the lowest occupation which the country afforded, and had more than once nearly died from delirium tremens. He had then come home penniless, and had—produced his story. If such evidence could avail to rescue a prisoner from his sentence, and to upset a verdict, what verdict or what sentence could stand? Poor Dick's sworn testimony, in Judge Bramber's mind, told rather against Caldigate than for him.

Then came the post-marks,—as to which the Bagwaxian theory was quite distinct from that as to the post-age-stamp. Here the judge found the facts to be somewhat complicated and mazy. It was long before he could understand the full purport of the argument used, and even at last he hardly understood the whole of it. But he could see nothing in it to justify him in upsetting the verdict;—nothing even to convince him that the envelope had been fraudulently handled. There was no evidence that such a dated stamp had not been

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in use at Sydney on the day named. Copies from the records kept daily at Sydney,—photographed copies,—should have been submitted before that argument had been used.

But when it came to the postage-stamp, then he told himself very quickly that the envelope had been fraudulently handled. The evidence as to the date of the manufacture of the stamp was conclusive. It could not have served to pay the postage on a letter from Sydney to Nobble in May, 1873, seeing that it had not then been in existence. And thus any necessity there might otherwise have been for further inquiry as to the post-marks was dissipated. The envelope was a declared fraud, and the fraud required no further proof. That morsel of evidence had been fabricated, and laid, at any rate, one of the witnesses in the last trial open to a charge of perjury. So resolving, Judge Bramber pushed the papers away from him, and began to think the case over in his mind.

There was certainly something in the entire case as it now stood to excuse Sir John. That was the first line which his thoughts took. An advocate having clearly seen into a morsel of evidence on the side opposed to him, and having proved to himself beyond all doubt that it was maliciously false, must be held to be justified in holding more than a mere advocate's conviction as to the innocence of his client. Sir John had of course felt that a foul plot had been contrived. A foul plot no doubt had been contrived. Had the discovery taken place before the case had been submitted to the jury, the detection of that plot would doubtless have saved the prisoner, whether guilty or innocent. So much Judge Bramber admitted.

But should it necessarily serve to save him now?

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Before a jury it would have saved him, whether guilty or innocent. But the law had got hold of him, and had made him guilty, and the law need not now subject itself to the normal human weakness of a jury. The case was now in his hands,—in his, and those of the Secretary, and there need be no weakness. If the man was innocent, in God's name let him go;—though, as the judge observed to himself, he had deserved all he had got for his folly and vice. But this discovered plot by no means proved the man's innocence. It only proved the determination of certain persons to secure his conviction, whether by foul means or fair. Then he recapitulated to himself various cases in which he had known false evidence to have been added to true, with the object of convincing a jury as to a real fact.

It might well be that this gang of ruffians,—for it was manifest that there had been such a gang,—finding the envelope addressed by the man to his wife, had fraudulently,—and as foolishly as fraudulently,—endeavoured to bolster up their case by the postage-stamp and the post-mark. Looking back at all the facts, remembering that fatal twenty thousand pounds, remembering that though the post-marks were forged on that envelope the writing was true, remembering the acknowledged promise and the combined testimony of the four persons,—he was inclined to think that something of the kind had been done in this case. If it were so, though he would fain see the perpetrators of that fraud on their trial for perjury, their fraud in no way diminished Caldigate's guilt. That a guilty man should escape out of the hands of justice by any fraud was wormwood to Judge Bramber. Caldigate was guilty. The jury had found him so. Could he take upon himself to say that the finding of the jury was wrong be-

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cause the prosecuting party had concocted a fraud which had not been found out before the verdict was given? Sir John Joram, whom he had known almost as a boy, had "demanded" the release of his client. The word stuck in Judge Bramber's throat. The word had been injudicious. The more he thought of the word the more he thought that the verdict had been a true verdict, in spite of the fraud. A very honest man was Judge Bramber;—but human.

He almost made up his mind,—but then was obliged to confess to himself that he had not quite done so. "It taints the entire evidence with perjury," Sir John had said. The woman's evidence was absolutely so tainted,—was defiled with perjury. And the man Crinkett had been so near the woman that it was impossible to disconnect them. Who had concocted the fraud? The woman could hardly have done so without the man's connivance. It took him all the morning to think the matter out, and then he had not made up his mind. To reverse the verdict would certainly be a thorn in his side,—a pernicious thorn,—but one which, if necessary, he would endure. Thorns, however, such as these are very persuasive.

At last he determined to have inquiry made as to the woman by the police. She had laid herself open to an indictment for perjury, and in making inquiry on that head something further might probably be learned.

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CHAPTER XXIII

HOW THE CONSPIRATORS THROVE

THERE had been some indiscretion among Caldigate's friends from which it resulted that, while Judge Bramber was considering the matter, and before the police intelligence of Scotland Yard even had stirred itself in obedience to the judge's orders, nearly all the circumstances which had been submitted to the judge had become public. Shand knew all that Bagwax had done. Bagwax was acquainted with the whole of Dick's evidence. And Hester down at Folking understood perfectly what had been revealed by each of those enthusiastic allies. Dick, as we know, had been staying at Folking, and had made his presence notable throughout the county. He had succeeded in convincing Uncle Babington and had been judged to be a false witness by all the Boltons. In that there had perhaps been no great indiscretion. But when Bagwax opened a correspondence with Mrs. John Caldigate and explained to her at great length all the circumstances of the postmark and the postage-stamps, and when at her instance he got a day's holiday and rushed down to Folking, then, as he felt himself, he was doing that of which Sir John Joram and Mr. Jones would not approve. But he could not restrain himself. And why should he restrain himself when he had lost all hope of his journey to Sydney? When the prospect of that delight no longer illumined his days, why should he not enjoy the other

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delight of communicating his tidings,—his own discoveries,—to the afflicted lady? Unless he did so it would appear to her that Joram had done it all, and there would be no reward,—absolutely none! So he told his tale,—at first by letter and then with his own natural eloquence. "Yes, Mrs. Caldigate; the post-marks are difficult. It takes a lifetime of study to understand all the ins and outs of post-marks. To me it is A B C of course. When I had spent a week or two looking into it I was sure that impression had never been made in the way of business." Bagwax was sitting out on the lawn at Folking, and the bereaved wife, dressed in black, was near him, holding in her hand one of the photographed copies of the envelope. "It's A B C to me; but I don't wonder you shouldn't see it."

"I think I do see a good deal," said Hester.

"But any babe may understand that," said Bagwax, pressing forward and putting his forefinger on the obliteration of the postage-stamp. "You see the date in the post-mark."

"I know the date very well."

"We've had it proved that on the date given there, this identical postage-stamp had not yet been manufactured. The Secretary of State can't get over that. I'll defy him."

"Why don't they release him at once then?"

"Between you and me, Mrs. Caldigate, I think it's Judge Bramber."

"He can't want to injure an innocent man."

"From what I've heard Sir John say, I fancy he doesn't like to have the verdict upset. But they must do it. I'll defy them to get over that." And again he tapped the Queen's head. Then he told the story of

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his love for Jemima, and of his engagement. Of course he was praised and petted,—as indeed he deserved; and thus, though the house at Folking was a sad house, he enjoyed himself,—as men do when much is made of them by pretty women.

But the result of all this was that every detail of the story became known to the public, and was quite common down at Cambridge. The old squire was urgent with Mr. Seely, asking why it was that when those things were known an instant order had not come from the Secretary of State for the liberation of his son. Mr. Seely had not been altogether pleased at the way in which Sir John had gone to work, and was still convinced of the guilt of his own client. His answer was therefore unsatisfactory, and the old squire proclaimed his intention of proceeding himself to London and demanding an interview with the Secretary of State. Then the Cambridge newspapers took up the subject,—generally in the Caldigate interest,—and from thence the matter was transferred to the metropolitan columns,—which, with one exception, were strong in favour of such a reversal of the verdict as could be effected by a pardon from the Queen. The one exception was very pellucid, very unanswerable, and very cold-blooded. It might have been written by Judge Bramber himself, but that Judge Bramber would sooner have cut his hand off than have defiled it by making public aught that had come before him judicially or officially. But all Judge Bramber's arguments were there set forth. Dick wished his father at once to proceed against the paper for libel because the paper said that his word could not be taken for much. The post-mark theory was exposed to derision. There was no doubt much in the postage-stamp, but not enough to

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upset the overwhelming weight of evidence by which the verdict had been obtained. And so the case became really public, and the newspapers were bought and read with the avidity which marks those festive periods in which some popular criminal is being discussed at every breakfast-table.

Much of this had occurred before the intelligence of Scotland Yard had been set to work in obedience to Judge Bramber. The papers had been a day or two in the Home Office, and three or four days in the judge's hands before he could look at them. To Hester and the old squire at Folking the incarceration of that injured darling was the one thing in all the world which now required attention. To redress that terrible grievance, judges, secretaries, thrones, and parliaments, should have left their wonted tracks and thought of nothing till it had been accomplished. But Judge Bramber, in the performance of his duties, was never hurried; and at the Home Office a delay but of three or four days amounted to official haste. Thus it came to pass that all that Bagwax had done and all that Shand had said were known to the public at large before the intelligence of Scotland Yard was at work, —before anybody had as yet done anything.

Among the public were Euphemia Smith and Mr. Crinkett,—Adamson also, and Anna Young, the other witness. Since the trial, this confraternity had not passed an altogether fraternal life. When the money had been paid, the woman had insisted on having the half. She, indeed, had carried the cheque for the amount away from the Jericho Coffee-house. It had been given into her hands and those of Crinkett conjointly, and she had secured the document. The amount was payable to their joint order, and each had felt that

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it would be better to divide the spoil in peace. Crinkett had taken his half with many grumblings, because he had, in truth, arranged the matter and hitherto paid the expenses. Then the woman had wished to start at once for Australia, taking the other female with her. But to this Crinkett had objected. They would certainly, he said, be arrested for breaking their bail at whatever port they might reach,—and why should they go, seeing that the money had been paid to them on the distinct understanding that they were not pledged to abandon the prosecution. Most unwillingly the woman remained;—but did so fearing lest worse evil might betide her. Then there had arisen quarrels about the money between the two females, and between Crinkett and Adamson. It was in vain that Crinkett showed that, were he to share with Adamson, there would be very little of the plunder left to him. Adamson demanded a quarter of the whole, short of a quarter of the expenses, declaring that were it not paid to him, he would divulge everything to the police. The woman, who had got her money in her hand, and who was, in truth, spending it very quickly, would give back nothing for expenses, unless her expenses in England also were considered. Nor would she give a shilling to Anna Young, beyond an allowance of £2 a week, till, as she said, they were both back in the colony again. But Anna Young did not wish to go back to the colony. And so they quarrelled till the trial came and was over.

The verdict had been given on the 20th July, and it was about the middle of September when the newspapers made public all that Shand and Bagwax between them had said and done. At that time the four conspirators were still in England. The two men were

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living a wretched life in London, and the women were probably not less wretched at Brighton. Mrs. Smith, when she learned that Dick Shand was alive and in England, immediately understood her danger,—understood her danger, but did not at all measure the security which might come to her from the nature of Dick's character. She would have flown instantly without a word to anyone, but that the other woman watched her day and night. They did not live under the same roof, nor in similar style. Euphemia Smith wore silk, and endeavoured to make the best of what female charms her ill mode of life had left to her; while Young was content with poor apparel and poor living,—but spent her time in keeping guard on the other. The woman in silk knew that were she to leave her lodgings for half a day without the knowledge of the woman in calico, the woman in calico would at once reveal everything to the police. But when she understood the point which had been raised and made as to the post-mark,—which she did understand thoroughly,—then she comprehended also her own jeopardy, and hurried up to London to see Crinkett. And she settled matters with Young. If Young would go back with her to Australia, everything there should be made pleasant. Terms were made at the Brighton station. Anna Young was to receive two thousand pounds in London, and would then remain as companion with her old mistress.

In London there was a close conference, at first between the two principals only. Crinkett thought that he was comparatively safe. He had sworn to nothing about the letter; and though he himself had prepared the envelope, no proof of his handiwork was forthcoming that he had done so. But he was quite ready to start again to some distant portion of the earth's

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surface,—to almost any distant portion of the earth's surface,—if she would consent to a joining of purses. "And who is to keep the joint purse?" asked Mrs. Smith, not without a touch of grand irony.

"Me, of course," said Crinkett. "A man always must have the money."

"I'd sooner have fourteen years for perjury, like the Claimant," said Mrs. Smith, with a grand resolve that, come what might, she would stick to her own money.

But at last it was decided. Adamson would not stir a step, but consented to remain with two thousand pounds, which Crinkett was compelled to pay him. Crinkett handed him the money within the precincts of one of the city banks not an hour before the sailing of the Julius Vogel from the London Docks for Auckland in New Zealand. At that moment both the women were on board the Julius Vogel, and the gang was so far safe. Crinkett was there in time, and they were carried safely down the river. New Zealand had been chosen because there they would be further from their persecutors than at any other spot they could reach. And the journey would occupy long, and they were pervaded by an idea that as they had been hitherto brought in question as to no crime, the officers of justice would hardly bring them back from so great a distance.

The Julius Vogel touched at Plymouth on her outward voyage. How terribly inconvenient must be this habit of touching to passengers going from home, such as Euphemia Smith and Thomas Crinkett! And the wretched vessel, which had made a quick passage round from the Thames, lay two days and two nights at Dartmouth, before it went on to Plymouth. Our friends,

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of course, did not go on shore. Our friends, who were known as Mr. Catley and his two widowed sisters, Mrs. Salmon and Mrs. York, kept themselves very quiet, and were altogether well-behaved. But the women could not restrain some manifestation of their impatience. Why did not the vessel start? Why were they to be delayed? Then the captain made known to them that the time for starting had not yet come. Three o'clock on that day was the time fixed for starting. As the slow moments wore themselves away, the women trembled, huddled together on the poop of the vessel; while Crinkett, never letting the pipe out of his mouth, stood leaning against the taffrail, looking towards the port, gazing across the waters to see whether anything was coming towards the ship which might bode evil to his journey. Then there came the bustle preparatory to starting, and Crinkett thought that he was free, at any rate, for that journey. But such bustle spreads itself over many minutes. Quarter of an hour succeeded quarter of an hour, and still they were not off. The last passenger came on board, and yet they were not off. Then Crinkett with his sharp eyes saw another boat pushed off from the shore, and heard a voice declare that the Julius Vogel had received a signal not to start. Then Crinkett knew that a time of desperate trouble had come upon him, and he bethought himself what he would do. Were he to jump overboard, they would simply pick him up. Nor was he quite sure that he wished to die. The money which he had kept had not been obtained fraudulently, and would be left to him, he thought, after that term of imprisonment which it might be his fate to endure. But then, again, it might be that no such fate was in store for him. He had sworn only to the marriage and not to the letter.

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It might still be possible that he should be acquitted, while the woman was condemned. So he stood perfectly still, and said not a word to either of his companions as to the boat which was coming. He could soon see two men in the guise of policemen, and another who was certainly a policeman, though not in that guise. He stood there very quiet, and determined that he would tell his own name and those of the two women at the first question that was asked him. On the day but one following, Crinkett and Euphemia Smith were committed in London to take their trial for perjury.

Adamson, when he had read the reports in the newspapers, and had learned that the postage-stamp had been detected, and that Shand was at home, also looked about him a little. He talked over the matter at great length with Crinkett, but he did not tell Crinkett all his own ideas. Some of them he did make known to Crinkett. He would not himself go to the colonies with Crinkett, nor would he let Crinkett go till some share of the plunder had been made over to him. This after many words, had been fixed at two thousand pounds; and the money, as we have seen, had been paid. Crinkett had been careful to make the payment at as late a moment as possible. He had paid the amount,—very much to his own regret when he saw that boat coming,—because he was quite sure that Adamson would at once have denounced him to the police, had he not done so. Adamson might denounce him in spite of the payment;—but the payment appeared to him to be his best chance. When he saw the boat coming, he knew that he had simply thrown away his two thousand pounds.

In truth, he had simply thrown it away. There is no comfort in having kept one's word honestly, when

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one would fain have broken it dishonestly. Adamson, with the large roll of bank-notes still in his pocket, had gone at once to Scotland Yard and told his story. At that time all the details had been sent by the judge to the police-office, and it was understood that a great inquiry was to be made. In the first place, Crinkett and Euphemia Smith were wanted. Adamson soon made his bargain. He could tell something,—could certainly tell where Crinkett and the women were to be found; but he must be assured that any little peccadillo of which he himself might have been guilty would be overlooked. The peccadillo on his part had been very small, but he must be assured. Then he was assured, and told the police at once that they could stop the two travellers at Plymouth.

And of course he told more than that. There had been no marriage,—no real marriage. He had been induced to swear that there had been a marriage, because he had regarded the promise and the cohabitation as making a marriage,—"in heaven." So he had expressed himself, and so excused himself. But now his eyes had been opened to the error of his ways, and he was free to acknowledge that he had committed perjury. There had been no marriage;—certainly none at all. He made his deposition, and bound himself down, and submitted to live under the surveillance of the police till the affair should be settled. Then he would be able to go where he listed, with two thousand pounds in his pocket. He was a humble, silent, and generally obedient man, but in this affair he had managed to thrive better than any of the others. Anna Young was afterwards allowed to fill the same position; but she failed in getting any of the money. While the women were in London together, and as they were

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starting, Euphemia Smith had been too strong for her companion. She had declared that she would not pay the money till they were afloat, and then that she would not pay it till they had left Plymouth. When the police came on board the Julius Vogel, Anna Young had as yet received nothing.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE BOLTONS ARE VERY FIRM

WHILE all this was going on, as the general opinion in favour of Caldigate was becoming stronger every day, when even Judge Bramber had begun to doubt, the feeling which had always prevailed at Puritan Grange was growing in intensity and converting itself from a conviction into a passion. That the wicked bigamist had falsely and fraudulently robbed her of her daughter was a religion to Mrs. Bolton;—and, as the matter had proceeded, the old banker had become ever more and more submissive to his wife's feelings. All the Cambridge Boltons were in accord on this subject, —who had never before been in accord on any subject. Robert Bolton, who understood thoroughly each point as it was raised on behalf of Caldigate, was quite sure that the old squire was spending his money freely, his own money and his son's, with the view of getting the verdict set aside. What was so clear as that Dick Shand and Bagwax, and probably also Smithers from the Stamps and Taxes, were all in the pay of old Caldigate? At this time the defection of Adamson was not known to him, but he did know that a strong case was being made with the Secretary of State. "If it costs me all I have in the world I will expose them," he said up in London to his brother William, the London barrister.

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The barrister was not quite in accord with the other Boltons. He also had been disposed to think that Dick Shand and Bagwax might have been bribed by the squire. It was at any rate possible. And the twenty thousand pounds paid to the accusing witnesses had always stuck in his throat when he had endeavoured to believe that Caldigate might be innocent. It seemed to him still that the balance of evidence was against the man who had taken his sister away from her home. But he was willing to leave that to the Secretary of State and to the judge. He did not see why his sister should not have her husband and be restored to the world,—if Judge Bramber should at last decide that so it ought to be. No money could bribe Judge Bramber. No undue persuasion could weaken him. If that Rhadamanthus should at last say that the verdict had been a wrong verdict, then,—for pity's sake, for love's sake, in the name of humanity,—and for the sake of all Boltons present and to come, let the man be considered innocent.

But Robert Bolton was more intent on his purpose, and was a man of stronger passions. Perhaps some real religious scruple told him that a woman should not live with a man who was not her true husband,—let any judge say what he might. But hatred, probably, had more to do with it than religion. It was he who had first favoured Caldigate's claim on Hester's hand, and he who had been most grievously deceived. From the moment in which the conviction had come upon him that Caldigate had even promised his hand in marriage to Euphemia Smith, he had become Caldigate's enemy,—his bitter enemy; and now he could not endure the thought that he should be called upon again to receive Caldigate as his brother-in-law. Caldigate's guilt

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was an idea fixed in his mind which no Secretary of State, no Judge Bramber, no brother could expel.

And so it came to pass that there were hard words between him and his brother. "You are wrong," said William.

"How wrong? You cannot say that you believe him to be innocent."

"If he receives the Queen's pardon he is to be considered as innocent."

"Even though you should know him to have been guilty?"

"Well,—yes," said William, slowly, and perhaps indiscreetly. "It is a matter in which a man's guilt or innocence must be held to depend upon what persons in due authority have declared. As he is now guilty of bigamy in consequence of the verdict, even though he should never have committed the offence, so should he be presumed to be innocent, when that verdict has been set aside by the Queen's pardon on the advice of her proper officers,—even though he committed the offence."

"You would have your sister live with a man who has another wife alive? It comes to that."

"For all legal purposes he would have no other wife alive."

"The children would be illegitimate."

"There you are decidedly wrong," said the barrister. "The children would be legitimate. Even at this moment, without any pardon, the child could claim and would enter in upon his inheritance."

"The next of kin would claim," said the attorney.

"The burden of proving the former marriage would then be on him," said the barrister.

"The verdict would be evidence," said the attorney.

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"Certainly," said the barrister; "but such evidence would not be worth a straw after a Queen's pardon, given on the advice of the judge who had tried the former case. As yet we know not what the judge may say,—we do not know the facts as they have been expounded to him. But if Caldigate be regarded as innocent by the world at large, it will be our duty so to regard him."

"I will never look on him as Hester's husband," said the attorney.

"I and Fanny have already made up our minds that we would at once ask them to come to us for a month," said the barrister.

"Nothing on earth will induce me to speak to him," said the attorney.

"Then you will be very cruel to Hester," said the barrister.

"It is dreadful to me," said the attorney, "that you should care so little for your sister's reputation." And so they quarrelled. Robert, leaving the house in great dudgeon, went down on the following morning to Cambridge.

At Puritan Grange the matter was argued rather by rules of religion than of law; but as the rules of law were made by those interested to fit themselves to expediency, so were the rules of religion fitted to prejudice. No hatred could be more bitter than that which Mrs. Bolton felt for the man whom she would permit no one to call her son-in-law. Something as to the postage-stamp and the post-marks was told her; but with a woman's indomitable obstinacy she closed her mind against all that,—as indeed did also the banker. "Is her position in the world to depend upon a postage-stamp?" said the banker, intending to support his wife.

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Then she arose in her wrath, and was very eloquent. "Her position in the world!" she said. "What does it matter? It is her soul! Though all men and all women should call her a castaway, it would be nothing if the Lord knew her to be guiltless. But she will be living as an adulteress with an adulterer. The law has told her that it is so. She will feel every day and every night that she is a transgressor, and will vainly seek consolation by telling herself that men have pardoned that which God has condemned." And again she broke forth. "The Queen's pardon! What right has the Queen to pardon an adulterer who has crept into the bosom of a family and destroyed all that he found there? What sense of justice can any Queen have in her bosom who will send such a one back, to heap sin upon sin, to fasten the bonds of iniquity on the soul of my child?" Postage-stamps and post-marks and an old envelope! The triviality of the things as compared with the importance of everlasting life made her feel that they were unworthy to be even noticed. It did not occur to her that the presence of a bodkin might be ample evidence of murder. Post-marks indeed,—when her daughter's everlasting life was the matter in question! Then they told her of Dick Shand. She, too, had heard of Dick Shand. He had been a gambler. So she said,—without much truth. He was known for a drunkard, a spendthrift, a penniless idle ne'er-do-well who had wandered back home without clothes to his back;—which was certainly untrue, as the yellow trousers had been bought at San Francisco;—and now she was told that the hated miscreant was to be released from prison because such a one as this was ready to take an oath! She had a knack of looking on such men—ne'er-do-wells like Dick Shand and Caldi-

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gate,—as human beings who had, as it were, lost their souls before death, so that it was useless to think of them otherwise than as already damned. That Caldigate should become a good, honest, loving husband, or Dick Shand a truth-speaking witness, was to her thinking much more improbable than that a camel should go through the eye of a needle. She would press her lips together and grind her teeth and shake her head when anyone about her spoke of a doubt. The man was in prison, at any rate for two years,—locked up safe for so much time, as it might be a wild beast which with infinite trouble had been caged. And now they were talking of undoing the bars and allowing the monster to gorge himself again with his prey!

"If the Queen were told the truth she would never do it," she said to her amazed husband. "The Queen is a mother and a woman who kneels in prayer before her Maker. Something should be done, so that the truth may be made known to her."

To illuminate all the darkness which was betrayed by this appeal to him was altogether beyond Mr. Bolton's power. He appreciated the depth of the darkness. He knew, for instance, that the Queen herself would in such a matter act so simply in accordance with the advice of someone else, that the pardon, if given, would not in the least depend on her Majesty's sentiments. To call it the Queen's pardon was a simple figure of speech. This was manifest to him, and he was driven to endeavour to make it manifest to her. She spoke of a petition to be sent direct to the Queen, and insinuated that Robert Bolton, if he were anything like a real brother, would force himself into her Majesty's presence. "It isn't the Queen," said her husband.

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"It is the Queen. Mercy is the prerogative of the Crown. Even I know as much as that. And she is to be made to believe that this is mercy!"

"Her Majesty does what her Ministers tell her."

"But she wouldn't if she was told the truth. I do not for a moment believe that she would allow such a man as that to be let loose about the world like a roaring lion if she knew all that you and I know. Mercy indeed!"

"It won't be meant for mercy, my dear."

"What then? Do you not know that the man has another wife alive,—a wife much more suited to him than our poor darling? Nobody would hear my voice while there was yet time. And so my child, my only one, was taken away from me by her own father and her own brothers, and no one now will exert himself to bring her back to her home!" The poor old man had had but little comfort in his home since his daughter's marriage, and was now more miserable than ever.

Then there came a letter from Hester to her mother. Since Mrs. Bolton's last visit to Folking there had been some correspondence maintained. A few letters had passed, very sad on each side, in which the daughter had assured the mother of her undying love, and in which the mother had declared that day and night she prayed for her child. But of Caldigate, neither on one side nor on the other, had mention been made. Now Hester, who was full of hope, and sick with hope deferred, endeavoured to convince her mother that the entire charge against her husband had been proved by new evidence to be false. She recapitulated all the little details with which the diligent reader must by this

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time be too well acquainted. She made quite clear, as she thought, the infamous plot by which the envelope had been made to give false evidence, and she added the assurance that certainly before long her dear, dearest, ill-used husband would be restored to her. Then she went on to implore her mother's renewed affection both for herself and him and her boy, promising that by-gones should all be by-gones; and then she ended by declaring that though the return of her husband would make her very happy, she could not be altogether happy unless her parents also should be restored to her.

To this there came a crushing answer, as follows:

"PURITAN GRANGE, *28th September.*

"DEAREST HESTER,—It was unnecessary that you should ask for a renewal of your mother's love. There has never been a moment in which she has not loved you,—more dearly, I fear, than one human creature should ever love another. When I was strongest in opposing you, I did so from love. When I watched you in the hall all those hours, endeavouring to save you from further contact with the man who had injured you, I did it from love. You need not doubt my love.

"But as to all the rest, I cannot agree to a word that you say. They are plotting with false evidence to rescue the man from prison. I will not give way to it when my soul tells me that it is untrue. As your mother, I can only implore you to come back to me, and to save yourself from the further evil which is coming upon you. It may be that he will be enabled to escape, and then you will again have to live with a husband that is no husband,—unless you will listen to your mother's words.

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"You are thinking of the good things of this world,—of a home with all luxuries and ease, and of triumph over those who, for the good of your soul, have hitherto marred your worldly joys. Is it thus that you hope to win that crown of everlasting life which you have been taught to regard as the one thing worthy of a Christian's struggles? Is it not true that, since that wretched day on which you were taken away from me, you have allowed your mind to pass from thoughts of eternity to longings after vain joys in this bitter, fruitless vale of tears? If that be so, can he who has so encouraged you have been good to you? Do you remember David's words: 'Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God'? And then, again: 'They are brought down and fallen; but we are risen and stand upright.' Ask yourself whether you have stood upright or have fallen, since you left your father's house; whether you have trusted in the Lord your God, or in horses and chariots,—that is, in the vain comforts of an easy life? If it be so, can it be for your good that you have left your father's house? And should you not accept this scourge that has fallen upon you as a healing balm from the hands of the Lord?

"My child, I have no other answer to send you. That I love you till my very bowels yearn after you is most true. But I cannot profess to believe a lie, or declare that to be good which I know to be evil.

"May the Lord bless you, and turn your feet aright, and restore you to your loving mother,

"MARY BOLTON."

When Hester read this she was almost crushed. The delay since the new tidings had come to her

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had not, in truth, been very great. It was not yet quite a month since Shand had been at Folking, and a shorter period since the discoveries of Bagwax had been explained to her. But the days seemed to her to be very long; and day after day she thought that on that day at least the news of his promised release would be brought to her. And now, instead of these news, there came this letter from her mother, harder almost in its words than any words which had hitherto been either written or spoken in the matter. Even when all the world should have declared him innocent,—when the Queen, and the great officer of State, and that stern judge, should have said that he was innocent,—even then her cruel mother would refuse to receive him! She had been invited to ask herself certain questions as to the state of her soul, and as to the teaching she had received since her marriage. The subject is one on which there is no possible means of convergence between persons who have learned to differ. Her mother's allusions to chariots and horses was to her the enthusiasm of a fanatic. No doubt, teaching had come to her from her husband, but it had come at the period of life at which such lessons are easily learned. "Brought down and fallen!" she said to herself. "Yes, we are all brought down and fallen"; for she had not at all discarded the principles of her religious faith;—"but a woman will hardly raise herself by being untrue to her husband." She, too, yearned for her mother;—but there was never a moment's doubt in her mind to which she would cling if at last it should become necessary that one should be cast off.

Mrs. Bolton, when the letter had been despatched, sat brooding over it in deep regret mixed with deeper anger. She was preparing for herself an awful tragedy.

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She must be severed for ever from her daughter, and so severed with the opinion of all her neighbours against her! But what was all that if she had done right? Or of what service to her would be the contrary if she were herself to think,—nay, to know,—that she had done wrong?

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CHAPTER XXV

SQUIRE CALDIGATE AT THE HOME OFFICE

WHEN October came no information from the Secretary of State's office had yet reached Folking, and the two inhabitants there were becoming almost despondent as well as impatient. There was nobody with whom they could communicate. Sir John Joram had been obliged to answer a letter from the squire by saying that, as soon as there was anything to tell, the tidings would assuredly be communicated to him from the Home Office. The letter had seemed to be cold and almost uncivil; but Sir John had in truth said all that he could say. To raise hopes which, after all, might be fallacious, would have been, on his part, a great fault. Nor, in spite of his bet, was he very sanguine, sharing his friend Honybun's opinion as to Judge Bramber's obstinacy. And there was a correspondence between the elder Caldigate and the Home Office, in which the letters from the squire were long and well argued, whereas the replies, which always came by return of post, were short and altogether formal. Some assistant under-secretary would sign his name at the end of three lines, in which the correspondent was informed that as soon as the matter was settled the result would be communicated.

Who does not know the sense of aggravated injustice which comes upon a sufferer when redress for an acknowledged evil is delayed? The wronged one feels

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that the whole world must be out of joint in that all the world does not rise up in indignation. So it was with the old squire, who watched Hester's cheek becoming paler day by day, and who knew by her silence that the strong hopes which in his presence had been almost convictions were gradually giving way to a new despair. Then he would abuse the Secretary of State, say hard things of the Queen, express his scorn as to the fatuous absurdities of the English law, and would make her understand by his anger that he was also losing hope.

During these days preparations were being made for the committal of Crinkett and Euphemia Smith, nor would Judge Bramber report to the Secretary till he was convinced that there was sufficient evidence for their prosecution. It was not much to him that Caldigate should spend another week in prison. The condition of Hester did not even come beneath his ken. When he found allusion to it in the papers before him, he treated it as a matter which should not have been adduced,—in bringing which under his notice there had been something akin to contempt of court, as though an endeavour had been made to talk him over in private. He knew his own character, and was indignant that such an argument should have been used with himself. He was perhaps a little more slow, —something was added to his deliberation,—because he was told that a young wife and an infant child were anxiously expecting the liberation of the husband and father. It was not as yet clear to Judge Bramber that the woman had any such husband, or that the child could claim his father.

At this crisis, when the first weeks in October had dragged themselves tediously along, Mr. Caldigate, in

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a fit which was half rage and half moodiness, took himself off to London. He did not tell Hester that he was going till the morning on which he started, and then simply assured her that she should hear from him by every post till he returned.

"You will tell me the truth, father."

"If I know it myself, I will tell you."

"But you will conceal nothing?"

"No;—I will conceal nothing. If I find that they are all utterly unjust, altogether hard-hearted, absolutely indifferent to the wrong they have done, I will tell you even that." And thus he went.

He had hardly any fixed purpose in going. He knew that Sir John Joram was not in London, and that if he were in town he ought not to be made subject to visits on behalf of clients. To call upon any judge in such a matter would be altogether out of place, but to call upon such a judge as Judge Bramber, would be very vain indeed. He had in his head some hazy idea of forcing an answer from the officials in Downing Street; but in his heart he did not believe that he should be able to get beyond the messengers. He was one of a class, not very small in numbers, who, from cultivating within their bosom a certain tendency towards suspicion, have come to think that all government servants are idle, dilatory, supercilious, and incompetent. That some of these faults may have existed among those who took wages from the Crown in the time of George III., is perhaps true. And the memory of those times has kept alive the accusation. The vitality of these prejudices calls to mind the story of the Nottinghamshire farmer who, when told of the return of Charles II., asked what had become of Charles I. Naseby, Worcester, and the fatal day at Whitehall had

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not yet reached him. Tidings of these things had only been approaching him during these twelve years. The true character of the Civil Service is only now approaching the intelligence of those who are still shaking their heads over the delinquencies of the last century. But old Mr. Caldigate was a man peculiarly susceptible to such hard judgments. From the crown down to the black helmet worn by the policeman who was occasionally to be seen on Folking causeway, he thought that all such headpieces were coverings for malpractices. The bishop's wig had, he thought, disappeared as being too ridiculous for the times; but even for the judge's wig he had no respect. Judge Bramber was to him simply pretentious, and a Secretary of State no better than any other man. In this frame of mind how was it probable that he should do any good at the Home Office?

But in this frame of mind he went to the Home Office, and asked boldly for the great man. It was then eleven o'clock in the morning and neither had the great man, nor even any of the deputy great men, as yet made their appearance. Mr. Caldigate of course fell back upon his old opinion as to public functionaries, and, mentally, applied opprobrious epithets to men who, taking the public pay, could not be at their posts an hour before mid-day. He was not aware that the great man and the first deputy great man were sitting in the House of Commons at 2 A. M. on that morning, and that the office generally was driven by the necessity of things to accommodate itself to Parliamentary exigencies.

Then he was asked his business. How could he explain to a messenger that his son had been unjustly convicted of bigamy and was now in prison as a

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criminal? So he left his card and said that he would call again at two.

At that hour precisely he appeared again and was told that the great man himself could not see him. Then he nearly boiled over in his wrath, while the messenger, with all possible courtesy, went on to explain that one of the deputies was ready to receive him. The deputy was the Honourable Septimus Brown, of whom it may be said that the Home Office was so proud that it considered itself to be superior to all other public offices whatever simply because it possessed Brown. He had been there for forty years, and for many sessions past had been the salvation of Parliamentary secretaries and under-secretaries. He was the uncle of an earl, and the brother-in-law of a duke and a marquis. Not to know Brown was, at the West End, simply to be unknown. Brooks's was proud of him; and without him the "Travellers'" would not have been such a Travellers' as it is. But Mr. Caldigate, when he was told that Mr. Brown would see him, almost left the lobby in instant disgust. When he asked who was Mr. Brown, there came a muttered reply in which "permanent" was the only word audible to him. He felt that were he to go away in dudgeon simply because Brown was the name of the man whom he was called upon to see, he would put himself in the wrong. He would by so doing close his own mouth against complaint, which, to Mr. Caldigate, would indeed have been a cutting of his own nose off his own face. With a scowl, therefore, he consented to be taken away to Mr. Brown.

He was, in the first place, somewhat scared by the room into which he was shown, which was very large and very high. There were two clerks with Mr. Brown,

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who vanished, however, as soon as the squire entered the room. It seemed that Mr. Brown was certainly of some standing in the office, or he would not have had two arm-chairs and a sofa in his room. Mr. Caldigate, when he first consented to see Mr. Brown, had expected to be led into an uncarpeted chamber where there would have been half-a-dozen other clerks.

"I have your card, Mr. Caldigate," said the official. "No doubt you have called in reference to your son."

The squire had determined to be very indignant,—very indignant even with the Secretary of State himself, to whose indifference he attributed the delay which had occurred;—but almost more than indignant when he found that he was to be fobbed off with Mr. Brown. But there was something in the gentleman's voice which checked his indignation. There was something in Mr. Brown's eye, a mixture of good-humour and authority, which made him feel that he ought not to be angry with the gentleman till he was quite sure of the occasion. Mr. Brown was a handsome hale old man with grey whiskers and greyish hair, with a well-formed nose and a broad forehead, carefully dressed with a light waistcoat and a checked linen cravat, wearing a dark-blue frockcoat, and very well made boots,—an old man, certainly, but who looked as though old age must naturally be the happiest time of life. When a man's digestion is thoroughly good and his pockets adequately filled, it probably is so. Such were the circumstances of Mr. Brown, who, as the squire looked at him, seemed to partake more of the nature of his nephew and brothers-in-law than of the Browns generally.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Caldigate; "I have called about my son who, I think I may undertake to say, has been

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wrongly condemned, and is now wrongly retained in prison."

"You beg all the questions, Mr. Caldigate," said the permanent under-secretary, with a smile.

"I maintain that what you call the questions are now so clearly proved as not to admit of controversy. No one can deny that a conspiracy was got up against my son."

"I shall not deny it, certainly, Mr. Caldigate. But in truth I know very little or nothing about it." The squire, who had been seated, rose from his chair,—as in wrath,—about to pour forth his indignation. Why was he treated in this way,—he who was there on a subject of such tragic interest to him? When all the prospects, reputation, and condition of his son were at stake, he was referred to a gentleman who began by telling him that he knew nothing about the matter! "If you will sit down for a moment, Mr. Caldigate, I will explain all that can be explained," said Mr. Brown, who was weather-wise in such matters, and had seen the signs of a coming storm.

"Certainly I will sit down."

"In such cases as this the Secretary of State never sees those who are interested. It is not right that he should do so."

"There might be somebody to do so."

"But not somebody who has been concerned in the inquiry. The Secretary of State, if he saw you, could only refuse to impart to you any portion of the information which he himself may possess, because it cannot be right that he should give an opinion in the matter while he himself is in doubt. You may be sure that he will open his mouth to no one except to those from whom he may seek assistance, till he has been

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enabled to advise her Majesty that her Majesty's pardon should be given or refused."

"When will that be?"

"I am afraid that I cannot name a day. You, Mr. Caldigate, are, I know, a gentleman of position in your county and a magistrate. Cannot you understand how minutely facts must be investigated when a Minister of the Crown is called upon to accept the responsibility of either upsetting or confirming the verdict of a jury?"

"The facts are as clear as daylight."

"If they be so, your son will soon be a free man."

"If you could feel what his wife suffers in the meantime!"

"Though I did feel it,—though we all felt it; as probably we do, for though we be officials still we are men,—how should that help us? You would not have a man pardoned because his wife suffers!"

"Knowing how she suffered, I do not think I should let much grass grow under my feet while I was making the inquiry."

"I hope there is no such grass grows here. The truth is, Mr. Caldigate, that, as a rule, no person coming here on such an errand as yours is received at all. The Secretary of State cannot, either in his own person or in that of those who are under him, put himself in communication with the friends of individuals who are under sentence. I am sure that you, as a man conversant with the laws, must see the propriety of such a rule."

"I think I have a right to express my natural anxiety."

"I will not deny it. The post is open to you, and though I fear that our replies may not be considered

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altogether satisfactory, we do give our full attention to the letters we receive. When I heard that you had been here, and had expressed an intention of returning, from respect to yourself personally I desired that you might be shown into my room. But I could not have done that had it not been that I myself have not been concerned in this matter." Then he got up from his seat, and Mr. Caldigate found himself compelled to leave the room with thanks rather than with indignation.

He walked out of the big building into Downing Street, and down the steps into the park. And going into the gardens, he wandered about them for more than an hour, sometimes walking slowly along the water-side, and then seating himself for a while on one of the benches. What must he say to Hester in the letter which he must write as soon as he was back at his hotel? He tried to sift some wheat out of what he was pleased to call the chaff of Mr. Brown's courtesy. Was there not some indication to be found in it of what the result might be? If there were any such indication, it was, he thought, certainly adverse to his son. In whose bosom might be the ultimate decision, —whether in that of the Secretary, or the judge, or of some experienced clerk in the Secretary's office,— it was manifest that the facts which had now been proven to the world at large for many days, had none of the effects on that bosom which they had on his own. Could it be that Shand was false, that Bagwax was false, that the postage-stamp was false,—and that he only believed them to be true? Was it possible that after all his son had married the woman? He crept back to his hotel in Jermyn Street, and there he wrote his letter.

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"I think I shall be home to-morrow, but I will not say so for certain. I have been at the Home Office, but they would tell me nothing. A man was very civil to me, but explained that he was civil only because he knew nothing about the case. I think I shall call on Mr. Bagwax at the Post-office to-morrow, and after that return to Folking. Send in for the day-mail letters, and then you will hear from me again if I mean to stay."

At ten o'clock on the following day he was at the Post-office, and there he found Bagwax prepared to take his seat exactly at that hour. Thereupon he resolved, with true radical impetuosity, that Bagwax was a much better public servant than Mr. Brown. "Well, Mr. Caldigate,—so we've got it all clear at last," said Bagwax.

There was a triumph in the tone of the clerk's voice which was not intelligible to the despondent old squire. "It is not at all clear to me," he said.

"Of course you've heard."

"Heard what? I know all about the postage-stamp, of course."

"If Secretaries of State and judges of the Court of Queen's Bench only had their wits about them, the postage-stamp ought to have been quite sufficient," said Bagwax, sententiously.

"What more is there?"

"For the sake of letting the world know what can be done in our department, it is a pity that there should be anything more."

"But there is something. For God's sake tell me, Mr. Bagwax."

"You haven't heard that they caught Crinkett just as he was leaving Plymouth?"

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"Not a word."

"And the woman. They've got the lot of 'em, Mr. Caldigate. Adamson and the other woman have agreed to give evidence, and are to be let go."

"When did you hear it?"

"Well;—it is in the 'Daily Tell-tale.' But I knew it last night,—from a particular source. I have been a good deal thrown in with Scotland Yard since this began, Mr. Caldigate, and, of course, I hear things." Then it occurred to the squire that perhaps he had flown a little too high in going at once to the Home Office. They might have told him more, perhaps, in Scotland Yard. "But it's all true. The depositions have already been made. Adamson and Young have sworn that they were present at no marriage. Crinkett, they say, means to plead guilty; but the woman sticks to it like wax."

The squire had written a letter by the day-mail to say that he would remain in London that further day. He now wrote again, at the Post-office, telling Hester all that Bagwax had told him, and declaring his purpose of going at once to Scotland Yard.

If this story were true, then certainly his soon would soon be liberated.

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CHAPTER XXVI

MR. SMIRKIE IS ILL-USED

It was on a Tuesday that Mr. Caldigate made his visit to the Home Office, and on the Thursday he returned to Cambridge. On the platform whom should he meet but his brother-in-law, Squire Babington, who had come into Cambridge that morning intent on hearing something further about his nephew. He, too, had read a paragraph in his newspaper, "The Snapper," as to Crinkett and Euphemia Smith.

"Thomas Crinkett, and Euphemia Smith, who gave evidence against Mr. John Caldigate in the well-known trial at the last Cambridge assizes, have been arrested at Plymouth just as they were about to leave the country for New Zealand. These are the persons to whom it was proved that Caldigate had paid the enormous sum of twenty thousand pounds a few days before the trial. It is alleged that they are to be indicted for perjury. If this be true, it implies the innocence of Mr. Caldigate, who, as our readers will remember, was convicted of bigamy. There will be much in the whole case for Mr. Caldigate to regret, but nothing so much as the loss of that very serious sum of money. It would be idle to deny that it was regarded by the jury, and the judge, and the public as a bribe to the witnesses. Why it should have been paid will now probably remain forever a mystery."

The squire read this over three times before he could

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quite understand the gist of it, and at last perceived, —or thought that he perceived,—that if this were true the innocence of his nephew was incontestable. But Julia, who seemed to prefer the paternal mansion at Babington to her own peculiar comforts and privileges at Plum-cum-Pippins, declared that she didn't believe a word of it; and Aunt Polly, whose animosity to her nephew had somewhat subsided, was not quite inclined to accept the statement at once. Aunt Polly expressed an opinion that newspapers were only born to lie, but added that had she seen the news anywhere else she would not have been a bit surprised. The squire was prepared to swear by the tidings. If such a thing was not to be put into a newspaper, where was it to be put? Aunt Polly could not answer this question, but assisted in persuading her husband to go into Cambridge for further information.

"I hope this is true," said the Suffolk squire, tendering his hand cordially to his brother-in-law. He was a man who could throw all his heart into an internecine quarrel on a Monday and forget the circumstances altogether on the Tuesday.

"Of what are you speaking?" asked the squire of Folking, with his usual placid look, partly indifferent and partly sarcastic, covering so much contempt of which the squire from Suffolk was able to read nothing at all.

"About the man and the woman, the witnesses who are to be put in prison at Plymouth, and who now say just the contrary to what they said before."

"I do not think that can be true," said Mr. Caldigate.

"Then you haven't seen the 'Snapper?'" asked Mr. Babington, dragging the paper out of his pocket. "Look at that."

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They were now in a cab together, going towards the town, and Mr. Caldigate did not find it convenient to read the paragraph. But of course he knew the contents. "It is quite true," he said, "that the persons you allude to have been arrested, and that they are up in London. They will, I presume, be tried for perjury."

"It is true?"

"There is no doubt of it."

"And the party are splitting against each other?" asked Mr. Babington eagerly.

"Two of them have already sworn that what they swore before was false."

"Then why don't they let him out?"

"Why not, indeed?" said Mr. Caldigate.

"I should have thought they wouldn't have lost a moment in such a case. They've got one of the best fellows in the world at the Home Office. His name is Brown. If you could have seen Brown I'm sure he wouldn't have let them delay a minute. The Home Office has the reputation of being so very quick."

In answer to this the squire of Folking only shook his head. He would not even condescend to say that he had seen Brown, and certainly not to explain that Brown had seemed to him to be the most absurdly-cautious and courteously-dilatory man that he had ever met in his life. In Trumpington Street they parted, Mr. Caldigate proceeding at once to Folking, and Mr. Babington going to the office of Mr. Seely the attorney. "He'll be out in a day or two," said the man of Suffolk, again shaking his brother-in-law's hand; "and do you tell him from me that I hope it won't be long before we see him at Babington. I've been true to him almost from the first, and his aunt has come over now. There

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is no one against him but Julia, and there are things of course which young women won't forget."

Mr. Caldigate almost became genial as he accepted this assurance, telling himself that his brother magistrate was as honest as he was silly.

Mr. Babington, who was well known in Cambridge, asked many questions of many persons. From Mr. Seely he heard but little. Mr. Seely had heard of the arrest made at Plymouth, but did not quite know what to think about it. If it was all square, then he supposed his client must after all be innocent. But this went altogether against the grain with Mr. Seely. "If it be so, Mr. Babington," he said, "I shall always think the paying away of that twenty thousand pounds the greatest miracle I ever came across." Nevertheless, Mr. Seely did believe that the two witnesses had been arrested on a charge of perjury.

The squire then went to the governor of the jail, who had been connected with him many years as a county magistrate. The governor had heard nothing, received no information as to his prisoner from anyone in authority; but quite believed the story as to Crinkett and the woman. "Perhaps you had better not see him, Mr. Babington," said the governor, "as he has heard nothing as yet of all this. It would not be right to tell him till we know what it will come to." Assenting to this, Mr. Babington took his leave with the conviction on his mind that the governor was quite prepared to receive an order for the liberation of his prisoner.

He did not dare to go to Robert Bolton's office, but he did call at the bank. "We have heard nothing about it, Mr. Babington," said the old clerk over the counter. But then the old clerk added in a whisper, "None of the family take to the news, sir; but everybody else

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seems to think there is a great deal in it. If he didn't marry her I suppose he ought to be let out."

"I should think he ought," said the squire, indignantly, as he left the bank.

Thus fortified by what he considered to be the general voice of Cambridge, he returned the same evening to Babington. Cambridge, including Mr. Caldigate, had been unanimous in believing the report. And if the report were true, then, certainly, was his nephew innocent. As he thought of this some appropriate idea of the injustice of the evil done to the man and to the man's wife came upon him. If such were the treatment to which he and she had been subjected, if he, innocent, had been torn away from her and sent to the common jail, and if she, certainly innocent, had been wrongly deprived for a time of the name which he had honestly given her, then would it not have been right to open to her the hearts and the doors at Babington during the period of her great distress? As he thought of this he was so melted by ruth that a tear came into each of his old eyes. Then he remembered the attempt which had been made to catch this man for Julia—as to which he certainly had been innocent,—and his daughter's continued wrath. That a woman should be wrathful in such a matter was natural to him. He conceived that it behoved a woman to be weak, irascible, affectionate, irrational, and soft-hearted. When Julia would be loud in condemnation of her cousin, and would pretend to commiserate the woes of the poor wife who had been left in Australia, though he knew the source of these feelings, he could not be in the least angry with her. But that was not at all the state of his mind in reference to his son-in-law Augustus Smirkie. Sometimes, as he had heard Mr. Smirkie inveigh

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against the enormity of bigamy and of this bigamist in particular, he had determined that some "odd-come-shortly," as he would call it, he would give the vicar of Plum-cum-Pippins a moral pat on the head which should silence him for a time. At the present moment when he got into his carriage at the station to be taken home, he was not sure whether or no he should find the vicar at Babington. Since their marriage, Mr. Smirkie had spent much of his time at Babington, and seemed to like the Babington claret. He would come about the middle of the week and return on the Saturday evening, in a manner which the squire could hardly reconcile with all that he had heard as to Mr. Smirkie's exemplary conduct in his own parish. The squire was hospitality itself, and certainly would never have said a word to make his house other than pleasant to his own girl's husband. But a host expects that his corns should be respected, whereas Mr. Smirkie was always treading on Mr. Babington's toes. Hints had been given to him as to his personal conduct which he did not take altogether in good part. His absence from afternoon service had been alluded to, and it had been suggested to him that he ought sometimes to be more careful as to his language. He was not, therefore, ill-disposed to resent on the part of Mr. Smirkie the spirit of persecution with which that gentleman seemed to regard his nephew. "Is Mr. Smirkie in the house?" he asked the coachman. "He came by the 3.40, as usual," said the man. It was very much "as usual," thought the squire.

"There isn't a doubt about it," said the squire to his wife as he was dressing. "The poor fellow is as innocent as you."

"He can't be,—innocent," said Aunt Polly.

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"If he never married the woman whom they say he married he can't be guilty."

"I don't know about that, my dear."

"He either did marry her or he didn't, I suppose."

"I don't say he married her, but,—he did worse."

"No, he didn't," said the squire.

"That may be your way of thinking of it. According to my idea of what is right and what is wrong, he did a great deal worse."

"But if he didn't marry that woman he didn't commit bigamy when he married this one," argued he energetically.

"Still he may have deserved all he got."

"No; he mayn't. You wouldn't punish a man for murder because he doesn't pay his debts."

"I won't have it that he's innocent," said Mrs. Babington.

"Who the devil is, if you come to that?"

"You are not, or you wouldn't talk in that way. I'm not saying anything now against John. If he didn't marry the woman I suppose they'll let him out of prison, and I for one shall be willing to take him by the hand; but to say he's innocent is what I won't put up with!"

"He has sown his wild oats, and he's none the worse for that. He's as good as the rest of us, I daresay."

"Speak for yourself," said the wife. "I don't suppose you mean to tell me that in the eyes of the Creator he is as good a man as Augustus."

"Augustus be ——." The word was spoken with great energy. Mrs. Babington at the moment was employed in sewing on a button on the wristband of her husband's shirt, and in the start which she gave stuck the needle into his arm.

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"Humphrey!" exclaimed the agitated lady.

"I beg your pardon, but not his," said the squire, rubbing the wound. "If he says a word more about John Caldigate in my presence, I shall tell him what I think about it. He has got his wife and that ought to be enough for him."

After that they went downstairs and dinner was at once announced. There was Mr. Smirkie to give an arm to his mother-in-law. The squire took his married daughter while the other two followed. As they crossed the hall Julia whispered her cousin's name, but her father bade her be silent for the present. "I was sure it was not true," said Mrs. Smirkie.

"Then you're quite wrong," said the squire, "for it's as true as the Gospel." Then there was no more said about John Caldigate till the servants had left the room.

Mr. Smirkie's general appreciation of the good things provided did not on this occasion give the owner of them that gratification which a host should feel in the pleasures of his guests. He ate a very good dinner and took his wine with a full appreciation of its merits. Such an appetite on the part of his friends was generally much esteemed by the squire of Babington, who was apt to press the bottle upon those who sat with him, in the old-fashioned manner. At the present moment he eyed his son-in-law's enjoyment with a feeling akin to disappointment. There was a habit at Babington with the ladies of sitting with the squire when he was the only man present till he had finished his wine, and, at Mrs. Smirkie's instance, this custom was continued when she and her husband were at the house. Fires had been commenced, and when the dinner things had been taken away they clustered round the hearth. The

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squire himself sat silent in his place, out of humour, knowing that the peculiar subject would be introduced, and determined to make himself disagreeable.

"Papa, won't you bring your chair round?" said one of the girls who was next to him. Whereupon he did move his chair an inch or two.

"Did you hear anything about John?" said the other unmarried sister.

"Yes, I heard about him. You can't help hearing about him in Cambridge now. All the world is talking about him."

"And what does all the world say?" asked Julia, flippantly. To this question her father at first made no answer. "Whatever the world may say, I cannot alter my opinion," continued Julia. "I shall never be able to look upon John Caldigate and Hester Bolton as man and wife in the sight of God."

"I might just as well take upon myself to say that I didn't look upon you and Smirkie as man and wife in the sight of God."

"Papa!" screamed the married daughter.

"Sir!" ejaculated the married son-in-law.

"My dear, that is a strange thing to say of your own child," whispered the mother.

"Most strange!" said Julia, lifting both her hands up in an agony.

"But it's true," roared the squire. "She says that, let the law say what it may, these people are not to be regarded as man and wife."

"Not by me," said Julia.

"Who are you that you are to set up a tribunal of your own? And if you judge of another couple in that way, why isn't someone to judge of you after the same fashion?"

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"There is the verdict," said Mr. Smirkie. "No verdict has pronounced me a bigamist."

"But it might for anything I know," said the squire, angrily. "Some woman might come up in Plum-cum-Pippins and say you had married her before your first wife."

"Papa, you are very disagreeable," said Julia.

"Why shouldn't there be a wicked lie told in one place as well as in another? There has been a wicked lie told here; and when the lie is proved to have been a lie, as plain as the nose on your face, he is to tell me that he won't believe the young folk to be man and wife because of an untrue verdict! I say they are man and wife;—as good a man and wife as you and he;—and let me see who'll refuse to meet them as such in my house?"

Mr. Smirkie had not, in truth, made the offensive remark. It had been made by Mrs. Smirkie. But it had suited the squire to attribute it to the clergyman. Mr. Smirkie was now put upon his mettle, and was obliged either to agree or to disagree. He would have preferred the former, had he not been somewhat in awe of his wife. As it was, he fell back upon the indiscreet assertion which his father-in-law had made some time back. "I, at any rate, sir, have not had a verdict against me."

"What does that signify?"

"A great deal, I should say. A verdict, no doubt, is human, and therefore may be wrong."

"So is a marriage human."

"I beg your pardon, sir;—a marriage is divine."

"Not if it isn't a marriage. Your marriage in our church wouldn't have been divine if you'd had another wife alive."

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"Papa, I wish you wouldn't."

"But I shall. I've got to hammer it into his head somehow."

Mr. Smirkie drew himself up and grinned bravely. But the squire did not care for his frowns. That last backhander at the claret jug had determined him. "John Caldigate's marriage with his wife was not in the least interfered with by the verdict."

"It took away the lady's name from her at once," said the indignant clergyman.

"That's just what it didn't do," said the squire, rising from his chair;—"of itself it didn't affect her name at all. And now that it is shown to have been a mistaken verdict, it doesn't affect her position. The long and short of it is this, that anybody who doesn't like to meet him and his wife as honoured guests in my house had better stay away. Do you hear that, Julia?" Then without waiting for an answer he walked out before them all into the drawing-room, and not another word was said that night about the matter. Mr. Smirkie, indeed, did not utter a word on any subject, till at an early hour he wished them all good-night with dignified composure.

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CHAPTER XXVII

HOW THE BIG WIGS DOUBTED

"It's what I call an awful shame." Mr. Holt and parson Bromley were standing together on the causeway at Folking, and the former was speaking. The subject under discussion was, of course, the continued detention of John Caldigate in the county prison.

"I cannot at all understand it," said Mr. Bromley.

"There's no understanding nothing about it, sir. Every man, woman, and child in the county knows as there wasn't no other marriage, and yet they won't let 'un out. It's sheer spite, because he wouldn't vote for their man last 'lection."

"I hardly think that, Mr. Holt."

"I'm as sure of it as I stands here," said Mr. Holt, slapping his thigh. "What else 'd they keep 'un in for? It's just like their ways."

Mr. Holt was one of a rare class, being a liberal farmer,—a Liberal, that is, in politics; as was also Mr. Bromley, a Liberal among parsons,—*rara avis*. The Caldigates had always been Liberal, and Mr. Holt had been brought up to agree with his landlord. He was now beyond measure acerbated, because John Caldigate had not been as yet declared innocent on evidence which was altogether conclusive to himself. The Conservatives were now in power, and nothing seemed so natural to Mr. Holt as that the Home Secretary should keep his landlord in jail because the Caldigates were

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Liberals. Mr. Bromley could not quite agree to this, but he also was of opinion that a great injustice was being done. He was in the habit of seeing the young wife almost daily, and knew the havoc which hope turned into despair was making with her. Another week had now gone by since the old squire had been up in town, and nothing yet had been heard from the Secretary of State. All the world knew that Crinkett and Euphemia Smith were in custody, and still no tidings came,—yet the husband, convicted on the evidence of these perjurers, was detained in prison!

Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, and Hester's heart was very sick within her. "Why do they not tell me something?" she said when her father-in-law vainly endeavoured to comfort her. Why not, indeed? He could only say hard things of the whole system under which the perpetration of so great a cruelty was possible, and reiterate his opinion that, in spite of that system, they must, before long, let his son go free.

The delay in truth was not at the Home Office. Judge Bramber could not as yet quite make up his mind. It is hoped that the reader has made up his, but the reader knows somewhat more than the judge knew. Crinkett had confessed nothing,—though a rumour had got abroad that he intended to plead guilty. Euphemia Smith was constant in her assertion to all those who came near her, that she had positively been married to the man at Ahalala. Adamson and Anna Young were ready now to swear that all which they had sworn before was false; but it was known to the police that they had quarrelled bitterly as to the division of the spoil ever since the money had been paid to the ring-leaders. It was known that Anna Young had succeeded in getting nothing from the other woman, and that the man

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had unwillingly accepted his small share, fearing that otherwise he might get nothing. They were not trustworthy witnesses, and it was very doubtful whether the other two could be convicted on their evidence. The judge, as he turned it all over in his mind, was by no means sure that the verdict was a mistaken verdict. It was at any rate a verdict. It was a decision constitutionally arrived at from a jury. This sending back of the matter to him hardly was constitutional.

It was abhorrent to his nature,—not that a guilty man should escape, which he knew to be an affair occuring every day,—but that a guilty man, who had been found to be guilty, should creep back through the meshes of the law. He knew how many chances were given by the practice of British courts to an offender on his trial, and he was quite in favour of those chances. He would be urgent in telling a jury to give the prisoner the benefit of a doubt. But when the transgressor, with all those loopholes stopped, stood before him convicted, then he felt a delight in the tightness of the grip with which he held the wretch, and would tell himself that the world in which he lived was not as yet all astray, in that a guilty man could still be made to endure the proper reward of his guilt.

It was with him as when a hunter has hunted a fox after the approved laws of venery. There have been a dozen ways of killing the animal of which he has scorned to avail himself. He has been careful to let him break from his covert, regarding all who would stop him as enemies to himself. It has been a point of honour with him that the animal should suffer no undue impediment. Any ill-treatment shown to the favoured one in his course, is an injury done to the hunter himself. Let no man head the fox, let no man strive to

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drive him back upon the hounds. Let all be done by hunting law,—in accordance with those laws which give so many chances of escape. But when the hounds have run into their quarry, not all the eloquence of all the gods should serve to save that doomed one's life.

So it was with Judge Bramber and a convicted prisoner. He would give the man the full benefit of every quibble of the law till he was convicted. He would be severe on witnesses, harsh to the police, apparently a very friend to the man standing at the bar,—till the time came for him to array the evidence before the jury. Then he was inexorable; and when the verdict had been once pronounced, the prisoner was but a fox about to be thrown to the hounds.

And now there was a demand that this particular fox should be put back into his covert! The Secretary of State could put him back, if he thought fit. But in these matters there was so often a touch of cowardice. Why did not the Secretary do it without asking him? There had arisen no question of law. There was no question as to the propriety of the verdict as found upon the evidence given at the trial. The doubt which had arisen since had come from further evidence, of which the Secretary was as well able to judge as he. No doubt the case was difficult. There had been gross misdoing on both sides. But if Caldigate had not married the woman, why had he paid those twenty thousands? Why had he written those words on the envelope? There was doubt enough now, but the time for giving the prisoner the benefit of the doubt was gone. The fox had been fairly hunted, and Judge Bramber thought that he had better die.

But he hesitated;—and while he was hesitating there came to him a little reminder, a most gentle hint, in the

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shape of a note from the Secretary of State's private secretary. The old squire's visit to the office had not seemed to himself to be satisfactory, but he had made a friend for himself in Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown looked into the matter, and was of opinion that it would be well to pardon the young man. Even though there had been some jumping over a broomstick at Ahalala, why should things not be made comfortable here at home? What harm would a pardon do to anyone?—whereas there were so many whom it would make happy. So he asked the Secretary whether that wasn't a hard case of young Caldigate. The Secretary whispered that it was in Bramber's hands, upon which Mr. Brown observed that, if so, it was certainly hard. But the conversation was not altogether thrown away, for on that afternoon the private secretary wrote his note.

Judge Bramber when he received the note immediately burned it,—and this he did with considerable energy of action. If they would send him such cases as that, what right had they to remind him of his duty? He was not going to allow any private secretary, or any Secretary of State, to hurry him! There was no life or death in this matter. Of what importance was it that so manifest an evil-doer as this young Caldigate should remain in prison a day or two more,—a man who had attempted to bribe four witnesses by twenty thousand pounds? It was an additional evil that such a one should have such a sum for such a purpose. But still he felt that there was a duty thrown upon him; and he sat down with all the papers before him, determined to make up his mind before he rose from his chair.

He did make up his mind, but did so at last by referring back the responsibility to the Secretary of State. "The question is one altogether of evidence," he said,

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"and not of law. Any clear-headed man is as able to reach a true decision as I am. It is such a question as should be left to a jury,—and would justify a trial on appeal if that were practicable. It would be well that the case should stand over till Thomas Crinkett and Euphemia Smith shall have been tried for perjury, which, as I understand, will take place at the next winter Assizes. If the Secretary of State thinks that the delay would be too long, I would humbly suggest that he should take her Majesty's pleasure in accordance with his own opinion as to the evidence."

When that document was read at the Home Office by the few who were privileged to read it, they knew that Judge Bramber had been in a very ill humour. But there was no help for that. The judge had been asked for advice and had refused to give it; or had advised,—if his remark on that subject was to be taken for advice,—that the consideration of the matter should be postponed for another three months. The case, if there was any case in favour of the prisoner, was not one for pardon, but for such redress as might now be given for a most gross injustice. The man had been put to a very great expense, and had been already in prison for ten or eleven weeks, and his further detention would be held to have been very cruel if it should appear at last that the verdict had been wrong. The public press was already using strong language on the subject, and the Secretary of State was not indifferent to the public press. Judge Bramber thoroughly despised the press,—though he would have been very angry if his "Times" had not been ready for him at breakfast every morning. And two or three questions had already been asked in the House of Commons. The Secretary of State, with that habitual strategy, without

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which any Secretary of State must be held to be unfit for the position which he holds, contrived to answer the questions so as to show that, while the gentlemen who asked them were the most indiscreet of individuals, he was the most discreet of Secretaries. And he did this, though he was strongly of opinion that Judge Bramber's delay was unjustifiable. But what would be thought of a Secretary of State who would impute blame in the House of Commons to one of the judges of the land before public opinion had expressed itself so strongly on the matter as to make such expression indispensable? He did not think that he was in the least untrue in throwing blame back upon the questioners, and in implying that on the side of the Crown there had been no undue delay, though at the moment, he was inwardly provoked at the dilatoriness of the judge.

Public opinion was expressing itself very strongly in the press. "The Daily Tell-Tale" had a beautifully sensational article, written by their very best artist. The whole picture was drawn with a cunning hand. The young wife in her lonely house down in Cambridge, which the artist not inaptly called The Moated Grange! The noble, innocent, high-souled husband, eating his heart out within the bars of a county prison, and with very little else to eat! The indignant father, driven almost to madness by the wrongs done to his son and heir! Had the son not been an heir this point would have been much less touching. And then the old evidence was dissected, and the new evidence against the new culprits explained. In regard to the new culprits, the writer was very loud in expressing his purpose to say not a word against persons who were still to be tried;—but immediately upon that he went on and said

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a great many words against them. Assuming all that was said about them to be true, he asked whether the country would for a moment endure the idea that a man in Mr. Caldigate's position should be kept in prison on the evidence of such miscreants. When he came to Bagwax and the post-marks, he explained the whole matter with almost more than accuracy. He showed that the impression could not possibly have been made till after the date it conveyed. He fell into some little error as to the fabrication of the postage-stamp in the colony, not having quite seized Bagwax's great point. But it was a most telling article. And the writer, as he turned it off at his club, and sent it down to the office of the paper, was ready to bet a five-pound note that Caldigate would be out before a week was over. The Secretary of State saw the article, and acknowledged its power. And then even the "Slipper" turned round and cautiously expressed an opinion that the time had come for mercy.

There could be no doubt that public opinion was running very high in Caldigate's favour, and that the case had become thoroughly popular. People were again beginning to give dinner parties in London, and at every party the matter was discussed. It was a peculiarly interesting case because the man had thrown away so large a sum of money! People like to have a nut to crack which is "uncrackable,"—a Gordian knot to undo which cannot even be cut. Nobody could understand the twenty thousand pounds. Would any man pay such a sum with the object of buying off false witnesses,—and do it in such a manner that all the facts must be brought to light when he was tried? It was said here and there that he had paid the money because he owed it;—but then it had been shown so clearly that

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he had not owed anyone a penny! Nevertheless the men were all certain that he was not guilty, and the ladies thought that whether he were guilty or not did not matter much. He certainly ought to be released from prison.

But yet the Secretary doubted. In that unspoken but heartfelt accusation of cowardice which the judge had made against the great officer of State there had been some truth. How would it be if it should be made to appear at the approaching trial that the two reprobates, who had turned Queen's evidence against their associates, were to break down altogether in their assertions? It might possibly then become quite apparent that Caldigate had married the woman, and had committed bigamy, when he would already have been pardoned for the last three months! The pardon in that case would not do away with the verdict,—and the pardoned man would be a convicted bigamist. What, then, would be the condition of his wife and child? If subsequent question should arise as to the boy's legitimacy, as might so probably be the case, in what light would he appear, he who had taken upon himself, on his own responsibility, to extort from her Majesty a pardon in opposition to a righteous and just verdict,—in opposition to the judge who had tried the case? He had been angry with Judge Bramber for not deciding, and was now frightened at the necessity of deciding himself.

In this emergency he sent for the gentleman who had managed the prosecution on the part of the Crown, and asked him to read up the case again. "I never was convinced of the prisoner's guilt," said the barrister.

"No!"

"It was one of those cases in which we cannot be

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convinced. The strongest point against him was the payment of the money. It is possible that he paid it from a Quixotic feeling of honour."

"To false witnesses, and that before the trial!" said the Secretary.

"And there may have been a hope that, in spite of what he said himself as to their staying, they would take themselves off when they had got the money. In that way he may have persuaded himself that, as an honest man, he ought to make the payment. Then as to the witnesses, there can be little doubt that they were willing to lie. Even if their main story were true, they were lying as to details.

"Then you would advise a pardon?"

"I think so," said the barrister, who was not responsible for his advice.

"Without waiting for the other trial?"

"If the perjury be then proved,—or even so nearly proved as to satisfy the outside world,—the man's detention will be thought to have been a hardship." The Secretary of State thanked the barrister and let him go. He then went down to the House, and amidst the turmoil of a strong party conflict at last made up his mind. It was unjust that such responsibility should be thrown upon any one person. There ought to be some Court of Appeal for such cases. He was sure of that now. But at last he made up his mind. Early on the next morning the Queen should be advised to allow John Caldigate to go free.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

HOW MRS. BOLTON WAS NEARLY CONQUERED

ONE morning about the middle of October Robert Bolton walked out from Cambridge to Puritan Grange with a letter in his pocket,—a very long and a very serious letter. The day was that on which the Secretary of State was closeted with the barrister, and on the evening of which he at length determined that Caldigate should be allowed to go free. There had, therefore, been no pardon granted,—as yet. But in the letter the writer stated that such pardon would, almost certainly, be awarded.

It was from William Bolton, in London, to his brother the attorney, and was written with the view of proving to all the Boltons at Cambridge that it was their duty to acknowledge Hester as the undoubted wife of John Caldigate; and recommended also that, for Hester's sake, they should receive him as her husband. The letter had been written with very great care, and had been powerful enough to persuade Robert Bolton of the truth of the first proposition.

It was very long, and as it repeated all the details of the evidence for and against the verdict, it shall not be repeated here at its full length. Its intention was to show that, looking at probabilities, and judging from all that was known, there was much more reason to suppose that there had been no marriage at Ahalala than that there had been one. The writer acknowledged

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that, while the verdict stood confirmed against the man, Hester's family were bound to regard it, and to act as though they did not doubt its justice;—but that when that verdict should be set aside,—as far as any criminal verdict can be set aside,—by the Queen's pardon, then the family would be bound to suppose that they who advised her Majesty had exercised a sound discretion.

"I am sure you will all agree with me," he said, "that no personal feeling in regard to Caldigate should influence your judgment. For myself, I like the man. But that, I think, has had nothing to do with my opinion. If it had been the case that, having a wife living, he had betrayed my sister into all the misery of a false marriage, and had made her the mother of a nameless child, I should have felt myself bound to punish him to every extent within my power. I do not think it unchristian to say that in such a case I could not have forgiven him. But presuming it to be otherwise,—as we all shall be bound to do if he be pardoned,—then, for Hester's sake, we should receive the man with whom her lot in life is so closely connected. She, poor dear, has suffered enough, and should not be subjected to the further trouble of our estrangement.

"Nor, if we acknowledge the charge against him to be untrue, is there any reason for a quarrel. If he has not been bad to our sister in that matter, he has been altogether good to her. She has for him that devotion which is the best evidence that a marriage has been well chosen. Presuming him to be innocent, we must confess, as to her, that she has been simply loyal to her husband,—with such loyalty as every married man would desire. For this she should be rewarded rather than punished.

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"I write to you thinking that in this way I may best reach my father and Mrs. Bolton. I would go down and see them did I not know that your words would be more efficacious with them than my own. And I do it as a duty to my sister, which I feel myself bound to perform. Pray forgive me if I remind you that in this respect she has a peculiar right to a performance of your duty in the matter. You counselled and carried out the marriage,—not at all unfortunately if the man be, as I think, innocent. But you are bound at any rate to sift the evidence very closely, and not to mar her happiness by refusing to acknowledge him if there be reasonable ground for supposing the verdict to have been incorrect."

Sift the evidence, indeed! Robert Bolton had done that already very closely. Bagwax and the stamps had not moved him, nor the direct assurance of Dick Shand. But the incarceration by Government of Crinkett and Euphemia Smith had shaken him, and the fact that they had endeavoured to escape the moment they heard of Shand's arrival. But not the less had he hated Caldigate. The feelings which had been impressed on his mind when the first facts were made known to him remained. Caldigate had been engaged to marry the woman, and had lived with her, and had addressed her as his wife! The man had in a way got the better of him. And then the twenty thousand pounds! And then, again, Caldigate's manner to himself! He could not get over his personal aversion, and therefore unconsciously wished that his brother-in-law should be guilty,—wished at any rate that he should be kept in prison. Gradually had fallen upon him the conviction that Caldigate would be pardoned. And then of course there had come much consideration as to his sister's condi-

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tion. He, too, was a conscientious and an affectionate man. He was well aware of his duty to his sister. While he was able to assure himself that Caldigate was not her husband, he could satisfy himself by a conviction that it was his duty to keep them apart. Thus he could hate the man, advocate all severity against the man, and believe the while that he was doing his duty to his sister as an affectionate brother. But now there was a revulsion. It was three weeks since he and his brother had parted, not with the kindest feelings, up in London, and during that time the sifting of the evidence had been going on within his own breast from hour to hour. And now this letter had come,—a letter which he could not put away in anger, a letter which he could not ignore. To quarrel permanently with his brother William was quite out of the question. He knew the value of such a friend too well, and had been too often guided by his advice. So he sifted the evidence once again, and then walked off to Puritan Grange with the letter in his pocket.

In these latter days old Mr. Bolton did not go often into Cambridge. Men said that his daughter's misfortune had broken him very much. It was perhaps the violence of his wife's religion rather than the weight of his daughter's sufferings which cowed him. Since Hester's awful obstinacy had become hopeless to Mrs. Bolton, an atmosphere of sackcloth and ashes had made itself more than ever predominant at Puritan Grange. If anyone hated papistry Mrs. Bolton did so; but from a similar action of religious fanaticism she had fallen into worse than papistical self-persecution. That men and women were all worms to be trodden under foot, and grass of the field to be thrown into the oven, was borne in so often on poor Mr. Bolton that he had not strength

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left to go to the bank. And they were nearer akin to worms and more like grass of the field than ever, because Hester would stay at Folking instead of returning to her own home.

She was in this frame of mind when Robert Bolton was shown into the morning sitting-room. She was sitting with the Bible before her, but with some domestic needlework in her lap. He was doing nothing,—not even having a book ready to his hand. Thus he would sit the greater part of the day, listening to her when she would read to him, but much preferring to be left alone. His life had been active and prosperous, but the evening of his days was certainly not happy.

His son Robert had been anxious to discuss the matter with him first, but found himself unable to separate them without an amount of ceremony which would have filled her with suspicion. "I have received a letter this morning from William," he said, addressing himself to his father.

"William Bolton is, I fear, of the world worldly," said the stepmother. "His words always savour to me of the huge ungodly city in which he dwells."

But that this was not a time for such an exercise he would have endeavoured to expose the prejudice of the lady. As it was he was very gentle. "William is a man who understands his duty well," he said.

"Many do that, but few act up to their understanding," she rejoined.

"I think, sir, I had better read his letter to you. It has been written with that intention, and I am bound to let you know the contents. Perhaps Mrs. Bolton will let me go to the end so that we may discuss it afterwards."

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But Mrs. Bolton would not let him go to the end. He had not probably expected such forbearance. At every point as to the evidence she interrupted him, striving to show that the arguments used were of no real weight. She was altogether irrational, but still she argued her case well. She withered Bagwax and Dick with her scorn; she ridiculed the quarrels of the male and female witnesses; she reviled the Secretary of State, and declared it to be a shame that the Queen should have no better advisers. But when William Bolton spoke of Hester's happiness, and of the concessions which should be made to secure that, she burst out into eloquence. What did he know of her happiness? Was it not manifest that he was alluding to this world without a thought of the next? "Not a reflection as to her soul's welfare has once come across his mind," she said;—"not an idea as to the sin with which her soul would be laden were she to continue to live with the man when knowing that he was not her husband."

"She would know nothing of the kind," said the attorney.

"She ought to know it," said Mrs. Bolton, again begging the whole question.

But he persevered, as he had resolved to do when he left his house upon this difficult mission. "I am sure my father will acknowledge," he said, "that however strong our own feelings have been, we should bow to the conviction of others who——"

But he was promulgating a doctrine which her conscience required her to stop at once. "The conviction of others shall never have weight with me when the welfare of my eternal soul is at stake."

"I am speaking of those who have had better means

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of getting at the truth than have come within our reach. The Secretary of State can have no bias of his own in the matter."

"He is, I fear, a godless man, living and dealing with the godless. Did I not hear the other day that the great Ministers of State will not even give a moment to attend to the short meaningless prayers which are read in the House of Commons?"

"No one," continued Robert Bolton, trying to get away from sentiment into real argument,—"no one can have been more intent on separating them than William was when he thought that the evidence was against him. Now he thinks the evidence in his favour. I know no man whose head is clearer than my brother's. I am not very fond of John Caldigate."

"Nor am I," said the woman with an energy which betrayed much of her true feeling.

"But if it be the case that they are in truth man and wife——"

"In the sight of God they are not so," she said.

"Then," he continued, trying to put aside her interruption, and to go on with the assertion he had commenced, "it must be our duty to acknowledge him for her sake. Were we not to do so, we should stand condemned in the opinion of all the world."

"Who cares for the opinion of the world?"

"And we should destroy her happiness."

"Her happiness here on earth! What does it matter? There is no such happiness."

It was a very hard fight, but perhaps not harder than he had expected. He had known that she would not listen to reason,—that she would not even attempt to understand it. And he had learned before this how impregnable was that will of fanaticism in which she

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would entrench herself,—how improbable it was that she would capitulate under the force of any argument. But he thought it possible that he might move his father to assert himself. He was well aware that, in the midst of that apparent lethargy, his father's mind was at work with much of its old energy. He understood the physical infirmities and religious vacillation which, combined, had brought the old man into his present state of apparent submission. It was hardly two years since the same thing had been done in regard to Hester's marriage. Then Mr. Bolton had asserted himself, and declared his will in opposition to his wife. There had indeed been much change in him since that time, but still something of the old fire remained. "I have thought it to be my duty, sir," he said, "to make known to you William's opinion and my own. I say nothing as to social intercourse. That must be left to yourself. But if this pardon be granted, you will, I think, be bound to acknowledge John Caldigate to be your son-in-law."

"Your father agrees with me," said Mrs. Bolton, rising from her chair, and speaking in an angry tone.

"I hope you both will agree with me. As soon as tidings of the pardon reach you, you should, I think, intimate to Hester that you accept her marriage as having been true and legal. I shall do so, even though I should never see him in my house again."

"You of course will do as you please."

"And you, sir?" he said, appealing to the old man.

"You have no right to dictate to your father," said the wife angrily.

"He has always encouraged me to offer him my advice." Then Mr. Bolton shuffled in his chair, as though collecting himself for an effort,—and at last

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sat up, with his head, however, bent forward, and with both his arms resting on the arms of his chair. Though he looked to be old, much older than he was, still there was a gleam of fire in his eye. He was thin, almost emaciated, and his head hung forward as though there were not strength left in his spine for him to sit erect. "I hope, sir, you do not think that I have gone beyond my duty in what I have said."

"She shall come here," muttered the old man.

"Certainly, she shall," said Mrs. Bolton, "if she will. Do you suppose that I do not long to have my own child in my arms?"

"She shall come here, and be called by her name," said the father.

"She shall be Hester,—my own Hester," said the mother, not feeling herself as yet called upon to contradict her husband.

"And John Caldigate shall come," he said.

"Never," exclaimed Mrs. Bolton.

"He shall be asked to come. I say he shall. Am I to be harder on my own child than are all the others? Shall I call her a castaway, when others say that she is an honest married woman?"

"Who has called her a castaway?"

"I took the verdict of the jury, though it broke my heart," he continued. "It broke my heart to be told that my girl and her child were nameless,—but I believed it because the jury said so, and because the judged declared it. When they tell me the contrary, why shall I not believe that? I do believe it; and she shall come here, if she will, and he shall come." Then he got up and slowly moved out of the room, so that there might be no further argument on the subject.

She had reseated herself with her arms crossed, and

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there sat perfectly mute. Robert Bolton stood up and repeated all his arguments, appealing even to her maternal love,—but she answered him never a word. She had not even yet succeeded in making the companion of her life submissive to her! That was the feeling which was now uppermost in her mind. He had said that Caldigate should be asked to the house, and should be acknowledged throughout all Cambridge as his son-in-law. And having said it, he would be as good as his word. She was sure of that. Of what avail had been all the labour of her life with such a result?

"I hope you will think that I have done no more than my duty," said Robert Bolton, offering her his hand. But there she sat perfectly silent, with her arms still folded, and would take no notice of him. "Good-bye," said he, striving to put something of the softness of affection into his voice. But she would not even bend her head to him;—and thus he left her.

She remained motionless for the best part of an hour. Then she got up, and according to her daily custom walked a certain number of times round the garden. Her mind was so full that she did not as usual observe every twig, almost every leaf, as she passed. Nor, now that she was alone, was that religious bias, which had so much to do with her daily life, very strong within her. There was no taint of hypocrisy in her character; but yet with the force of human disappointment heavy upon her, her heart was now hot with human anger, and mutinous with human resolves. She had proposed to herself to revenge herself upon the men of her husband's family,—upon the men who had contrived that marriage for her daughter,—by devoting herself to the care of that daughter and her nameless grandson,

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and by letting it be known to all that the misery of their condition would have been spared had her word prevailed. That they should live together a stern, dark, but still sympathetic life, secluded within the high walls of that lonely abode, and that she should thus be able to prove how right she had been, how wicked and calamitous their interference with her child,—that had been the scheme of her life. And now her scheme was knocked on the head, and Hester was to become a prosperous ordinary married woman amidst the fatness of the land at Folking! It was all wormwood to her. But still, as she walked, she acknowledged to herself, that as that old man had said so,—so it must be. With all her labour, with all her care, and with all her strength, she had not succeeded in becoming the master of that weak old man.

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CHAPTER XXIX

THE NEWS REACHES CAMBRIDGE

THE tidings of John Caldigate's pardon reached Cambridge on the Saturday morning, and was communicated in various shapes. Official letters from the Home Office were written to the governor of the jail and to the sub-sheriff, to Mr. Seely, who was still acting as attorney on behalf of the prisoner, and to Caldigate himself. The latter was longer than the others, and contained a gracious expression of Her Majesty's regret that he as an innocent person should have been subjected to imprisonment. The Secretary of State also was described as being keenly sensible of the injustice which had been perpetrated by the unfortunate and most unusual circumstances of the case. As the Home Office had decided that the man was to be considered innocent, it decided also on the expression of its opinion without a shadow of remaining doubt. And the news reached Cambridge in other ways by the same post. William Bolton wrote both to his father and brother, and Mr. Brown the Under Secretary sent a private letter to the old squire at Folking, of which further mention shall be made. Before church time on the Sunday morning, the fact that John Caldigate was to be released, or had been released from prison, was known to all Cambridge.

Caldigate himself had borne his imprisonment on the whole well. He had complained but little to those around him, and had at once resolved to endure the

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slowly passing two years with silent fortitude,—as a brave man will resolve to bear any evil for which there is no remedy. But a more wretched man than he was after the first week of bitterness could hardly be found. Fortitude has no effect in abating such misery other than what may come from an absence of fretful impatience. The man who endures all that the tormentors can do to him without a sign, simply refuses to acknowledge the agonies inflicted. So it was with Caldigate. Though he obeyed with placid readiness all the prison instructions, and composed his features and seemed almost to smile when that which was to be exacted from him was explained, he ate his heart in dismay as he counted the days, the hours, the minutes, and then calculated the amount of misery that was in store for him. And there was so much more for him to think of than his own condition. He knew of course that he was innocent of the crime imputed to him;—but would it not be the same to his wife and child as though he had been in truth guilty? Would not his boy to his dying day be regarded as illegitimate? And though he had been wrongly condemned, had not all this come in truth from his own fault? And when that eternity of misery within the prison walls should have come to an end,—if he could live through it so as to see the end of it,—what would then be his fate, and what his duty? He had perfect trust in his wife; but who could say what two years might do,—two years during which she would be subjected to the pressure of all her friends? Where should he find her when the months had passed? And if she were no longer at Folking, would she come back to him? He was sure, nearly sure that he could not claim her as his wife. And were she still minded to share her future lot with him,

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in what way should he treat her? If that horrid woman was his wife in the eye of the law,—and he feared though hardly knew that it would be so,—then could not that other one, who was to him as a part of his own soul, be his wife also? What would become of his child, who, as far as he could see, would not be his child at all in the eye of the law? Even while he was still a free man still uncondemned, an effort had been made to rob him of his wife and boy,—an effort which for a time had seemed to be successful. How would Hester be able to withstand such attempts when they would be justified by a legal decision that she was not his wife,—and could not become his wife while that other woman was alive? Such thoughts as these did not tend to relieve the weariness of his days.

The only person from the outside world whom he was allowed to see during the three months of his incarceration was Mr. Seely, and with him he had two interviews. From the time of the verdict Mr. Seely was still engaged in making those enquiries as to the evidence of which we have heard so much, and though he was altogether unsympathetic and incredulous, still he did his duty. He had told his client that these enquiries were being made, and had, on his second visit, informed him of the arrival of Dick Shand. But he had never spoken with hope, and had almost ridiculed Bagwax with his postage-stamp and post-marks. When Caldigate first heard that Dick was in England,—for a minute or two,—he allowed himself to be full of hope. But the attorney had dashed his hopes. What was Shand's evidence against the testimony of four witnesses who had borne the fire of cross-examination? Their character was not very good, but Dick's was, if possible, worse. Mr. Seely did not think that Dick's

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word would go for much. He could simply say that, as far as he knew, there had been no marriage. And in this Mr. Seely had been right, for Dick's word had not gone for much. Then, when Crinkett and Mrs. Smith had been arrested, no tidings had reached him of that further event. It had been thought best that nothing as to that should be communicated to him till the result should be known.

Thus it had come to pass that when the tidings reached the prison he was not in a state of expectation. The governor of the prison knew what was going on, and had for days been looking for the order of release. But he had not held himself to be justified in acquainting his prisoner with the facts. The despatches to him and to Caldigate from the Home Office were marked immediate, and by the courtesy of the postmaster were given in at the prison gates before daylight. Caldigate was still asleep when the door of the cell was opened by the governor in person, and the communication was made to him as he lay for the last time stretched on his prison pallet. "You can get up a free man, Mr. Caldigate," said the governor, with his hand on his prisoner's shoulder. "I have here the Queen's pardon. It has reached me this morning." Caldigate got up and looked at the man as though he did not at first understand the words that had been spoken. "It is true, Mr. Caldigate. Here is my authority,—and this, no doubt, is a communication of the same nature to yourself." Then Caldigate took the letter, and, with his mind still bewildered, made himself acquainted with the gratifying fact that all the big-wigs were very sorry for the misfortune which had befallen him.

In his state of mind, as it then was, he was by no means disposed to think much of the injustice done to

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him. He had in store for him, for immediate use, a whole world of glorious bliss. There was his house, his property, his farm, his garden, and the free air. And there would be the knowledge of all those around him that he had not done the treacherous thing of which those wretches had accused him. And added to all this, and above all this, there would be his wife and his child! It was odd enough that a word from the mouth of an exalted Parliamentary personage should be able to give him back one wife and release him from another,—in opposition to the decision of the law,—should avail to restore to his boy the name and birthright of which he had been practically deprived, and should, by a stroke of his pen, undo all that had been done by the combined efforts of jury, judge, and prosecutor! But he found that so it was. He was pardoned, forsooth, as though he were still a guilty man! Yet he would have back his wife and child, and no one could gainsay him.

"When can I go?" he said, jumping from his bed.

"When you please;—now, at once. But you had better come into the house and breakfast with me first."

"If I may I would rather go instantly. Can you send for a carriage for me?" Then the governor endeavoured to explain to him that it would be better for his wife, and more comfortable for everybody concerned, that she should have been enabled to expect him, if it were only for an hour or two, before his arrival. A communication would doubtless have been made from the Home Office to someone at Folking, and as that would be sent out by the foot postman it would not be received before nine in the morning.

But Caldigate would not allow himself to be per-

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suaded. As for eating before he had seen the dear ones at home, that he declared to be impossible. A vision of what that breakfast might be to him with his own wife at his side came before his eyes, and therefore a messenger was at once sent for the vehicle.

But the postmaster, who from the beginning had never been a believer in the Australian wife, and, being a Liberal, was staunch to the Caldigate side of the question, would not allow the letter addressed to the old squire to be retained for the slow operations of the regular messenger, but sent it off manfully, by horse express, before the dawn of day, so that it reached the old squire almost as soon as the other letters reached the prison. The squire, who was an early man, was shaving himself when the despatch was brought into his room with an intimation that the boy on horseback wanted to know what he was to do next. The boy of course got his breakfast, and Mr. Caldigate read his letter, which was as follows:

"HOME OFFICE,—*October*, 187—.

"MY DEAR SIR,—When you did me the honour of calling upon me here I was able to do no more than express my sympathy as to the misfortune which had fallen upon your family, and to explain to you, I fear not very efficiently, that at that moment the mouths of all of us here were stopped by official prudence as to the matter which was naturally so near your heart. I have now the very great pleasure of informing you that the Secretary of State has this morning received her Majesty's command to issue a pardon for your son. The official intimation will be sent to him and to the county authorities by this post, and by the time that this reaches you he will be a free man.

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"In writing to you, I need hardly explain that the form of a pardon from the throne is the only mode allowed by the laws of the country for setting aside a verdict which has been found in error upon false evidence. Unfortunately, perhaps, we have not the means of annulling a criminal conviction by a second trial; and therefore, on such occasions as this,—occasions which are very rare,—we have but this lame way of redressing a great grievance. I am happy to think that in this case the future effect will be as complete as though the verdict had been reversed. As to the suffering which has been already endured by your son, by his much-injured wife, and by yourself, I am aware that no redress can be given. It is one of those cases in which the honest and good have to endure a portion of the evil produced by the dishonesty of the wicked. I can only add to this my best wishes for your son's happiness on his return to his home, and express a hope that you will understand that I would most willingly have made your visit to the Home Office more satisfactory had it been within my power to do so.—Believe me, very faithfully yours,

"SEPTIMUS BROWN."

He had not read this letter to the end, and had hardly washed the soap from his face, before he was in his daughter-in-law's room. She was there with her child, still in bed,—thinking, thinking, thinking whether there would ever come an end to her misery. "It has come," said the old man.

"What has come?" she asked, jumping up with the baby in her arms. But she knew what had come, for he had the letter open in his hands.

"They have pardoned him. The absurdity of the

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thing! Pardoning a man whom they know to be innocent, and to have been injured!"

But the "absurdity of the thing," as the old squire very naturally called it, was nothing to her now. He was to come back to her. She would be in his arms that day. On that very day she would once again hold up her boy to be kissed by his father.

"Where is he? When will he come? Of course I will go to him! You will make them have the waggonette at once? will you not? I will be dressed in five minutes if you will go. Of course I will go to fetch him."

But this the squire would not allow. The carriage should be sent, of course, and if it met his son on the road, as was probable, there would be no harm done. But it would not be well that the greeting between the husband and the wife should be in public. So he went out to order the carriage and to prepare himself to accompany it, leaving her to think of her happiness and to make herself ready for the meeting. But when left to herself she could hardly compose herself so as to brush her hair and give herself those little graces which should be pleasant to his eye. "Papa is coming," she said to her boy over and over again. "Papa is coming back. Papa will be here; your own, own, own papa." Then she threw aside the black gown, which she had worn since he left her, and chose for her wear one which he himself had taken pride in buying for her,—the first article of her dress in the choice of which he had been consulted as her husband; and with quick unsteady hand she pulled out some gay ribbon for her baby. Yes;—she and her boy would once again be bright for his sake;—for his sake there should again be gay ribbons and soft silks. "Papa is coming, my

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own one; your own, own papa!" and then she smothered the child with kisses.

While they were sitting at breakfast at Puritan Grange, the same news reached Mr. and Mrs. Bolton. The letter to the old man from his son in town was very short, merely stating that the authorities at the Home Office had at last decided that Caldigate should be released from prison. The writer knew that his father would be prepared for this news by his brother; and all that could be said in the way of argument had been said already. The letters which came to Puritan Grange were few in number, and were generally addressed to the lady. The banker's letters were all received at the house of business in the town. "What is it?" asked the wife, as soon as she saw the long official envelope. But he read it to the end very slowly before he vouchsafed her any reply. "It has to do with that wretched man in prison," she said. "What is it?"

"He is in prison no longer."

"They have let him escape?"

"The Queen has pardoned him because he was not guilty."

"The Queen! As though she could know whether he be guilty or innocent. What can the Queen know of the manner of his life in foreign parts,—before he had taken my girl away from me?"

"He never married the woman. Let there be no more said about it. He never married her."

But Mrs. Bolton, though she was not victorious, was not to be silenced by a single word. No more about it, indeed! There must be very much more about it. "If she was not his wife, she was worse," she said.

"He has repented of that."

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"Repented!" she said, with scorn. What very righteous person ever believed in the repentance of an enemy?

"Why should he not repent?"

"He has had leisure in jail."

"Let up hope that he has used it. At any rate he is her husband. There are not many days left to me here. Let me at least see my daughter during the few that remain to me."

"Do I not want to see my own child?"

"I will see her and her boy;—and I will have them called by the name which is theirs. And he shall come,—if he will. Who are you, or who am I, that we shall throw in his teeth the sins of his youth?" Then she became sullen and there was not a word more said between them that morning. But after breakfast the old gardener was sent into town for a fly, and Mr. Bolton was taken to the bank.

"And what are we to do now?" asked Mrs. Robert Bolton of her husband, when the tidings were made known to her also at her breakfast-table.

"We must take it as a fact that she is his wife."

"Of course, my dear. If the Secretary of State were to say that I was his wife, I suppose I should have to take it as a fact."

"If he said that you were a goose it might be nearer the mark."

"Really! But a goose must know what she is to do."

"You must write her a letter and call her Mrs. Caldigate. That will be an acknowledgment."

"And what shall I say to her?"

"Ask her to come here, if you will."

"And him?"

"And him, too. The fact is we have got to swallow

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it all. I was sure that he had married that woman, and then of course I wanted to get Hester away from him. Now I believe that he never married her, and therefore we must make the best of him as Hester's husband."

"You used to like him."

"Yes;—and perhaps I shall again. But why on earth did he pay twenty thousand pounds to those miscreants? That is what I could not get over. It was that which made me sure he was guilty. It is that which still puzzles me so that I can hardly make up my mind to be quite sure that he is innocent. But still we have to be sure. Perhaps the miracle will be explained some day."

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CHAPTER XXX

JOHN CALDIGATE'S RETURN

THE carriage started with the old man in it as soon as the horses could be harnessed; but on the Folking causeway it met the fly which was bringing John Caldigate to his home,—so that the father and son greeted each other in the street amidst the eyes of the villagers. To them it did not much matter, but the squire had certainly been right in saving Hester from so public a demonstration of her feelings. The two men said hardly a word when they met, but stood there for a moment grasping each other's hands. Then the driver of the fly was paid, and the carriage was turned back to the house. "Is she well?" asked Caldigate.

"She will be well now."

"Has she been ill?"

"She has not been very happy, John, while you have been away from her."

"And the boy?"

"He is all right. He had been spared the heart-breaking knowledge of the injury done to him. It has been very bad with you, I suppose."

"I do not like being in jail, sir. It was the length of the time before me that seemed to crush me. I could not bring myself to believe that I should live to see the end of it."

"The end has come, my boy," said his father, again taking him by the hand, "but the cruelty of the thing

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remains. Had there been another trial as soon as the other evidence was obtained the struggle would have kept your heart up. It is damnable that a man in an office up in London should have to decide on such a matter, and should be able to take his own time about it!" The grievance was still at the old squire's heart in spite of the amenity of Mr. Brown's letter; but John Caldigate, who was approaching his house and his wife, and to whom, after his imprisonment, even the flat fields and dikes were beautiful, did not at the moment much regard the anomaly of the machinery by which he had been liberated.

Hester in the meantime had donned her silk dress, and had tied the gay bow round her baby's frock, who was quite old enough to be astonished and charmed by the unusual finery in which he was apparelled. Then she sat herself at the window of a bedroom which looked out on to the gravel sweep, with her boy on her lap, and there she was determined to wait till the carriage should come.

But she had hardly seated herself before she heard the wheels. "He is here. He is coming. There he is," she said to the child. "Look! look! It is papa." But she stood back from the window that she might not be seen. She had thought it out with many fluctuations as to the very spot in which she would meet him. At one moment she had intended to go down to the gate, then to the hall door, and again she had determined that she would wait for him in the room in which his breakfast was prepared for him. But she had ordered it otherwise at last. When she saw the carriage approaching, she retreated back from the window, so that he should not even catch a glimpse of her; but she had seen him as he sat, still holding his

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father's hand. Then she ran back to her own chamber and gave her orders as she passed across the passage. "Go down, nurse, and tell him that I am here. Run quick, nurse; tell him to come at once."

But he needed no telling. Whether he had divined her purpose, or whether it was natural to him to fly like a bird to his nest, he rushed upstairs and was in the room almost before his father had left the carriage. She had the child in her hands when she heard him turn the lock of the door; but before he entered the boy had been laid in his cradle,—and then she was in his arms.

For the first few minutes she was quite collected, not saying much, but answering his questions by a word or two. Oh yes; she was well; and baby was well,—quite well. He, too, looked well, she said, though there was something of sadness in his face. "But I will kiss that away,—so soon, so soon." She had always expected that he would come back long, long before the time that had been named. She had been sure of it, she declared, because that it was impossible that so great injustice should be done. But the last fortnight had been very long. When those wicked people had been put in prison she had thought that then surely he would come. But now he was there, with his arms round her, safe in his own home, and everything was well. Then she lifted the baby up to be kissed again and again, and began to dance and spring in her joy. Then, suddenly, she almost threw the child into his arms, and seating herself, covered her face with her hands and began to sob with violence. When he asked her, with much embracing, to compose herself, sitting close to her, kissing her again and again, she shook her head as it lay upon his shoulder, and

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then burst out into a fit of laughter. "What does it matter," she said after a while, as he knelt at her knees;—"what does it matter? My boy's father has come back to him. My boy has got his own name, and he is an honest true Caldigate; and no one again will tell me that another woman owns my husband, my own husband, the father of my boy. It almost killed me, John, when they said that you were not mine. And yet I knew that they said it falsely. I never doubted for a moment. I knew that you were my own, and that my boy had a right to his father's name. But it was hard to hear them say so, John. It was hard to bear when my mother swore that it was so!"

At last they went down and found the old squire waiting for his breakfast. "I should think," said he, "that you would be glad to see a loaf of bread on a clean board again, and to know that you may cut it as you please. Did they give you enough where you were?"

"I didn't think much about it, sir."

"But you must think about it now," said Hester. "To please me you must like everything; your tea and your fresh eggs, and the butter and the cream. You must let yourself be spoilt for a time just to compensate me for your absence."

"You have made yourself smart to receive him at any rate," said the squire, who had become thoroughly used to the black gown which she had worn morning, noon, and evening while her husband was away.

"Why should I not be smart," she said, "when my man has come to me? For whose eyes shall I put on the raiment that is his own but for his? I was much lower than a widow in the eyes of all men; but now I

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have got my husband back again. And my boy shall wear the very best that he has, so that his father may see him smile at his own gaudiness. Yes, father, I may be smart now. There were moments in which I thought that I might never more wear the pretty things which he had given me." Then she rose from her seat again, and hung on his neck, and wept and sobbed till he feared that her heartstrings would break with joy.

So the morning passed away among them till about eleven o'clock, when the servant brought in word that Mr. Holt and one or two other of the tenants wanted to see the young master. The squire had been sitting alone in the back room so that the husband and wife might be left together; but he had heard voices with which he was familiar, and he now came through to ask Hester whether the visitors should be sent away for the present. But Hester would not have turned a dog from the door which had been true to her husband through his troubles. "Let them come," she said. "They have been so good to me, John, through it all! They have always known that baby was a true Caldigate."

Holt and the other farmers were shown into the room, and Holt as a matter of course became the spokesman. When Caldigate had shaken hands with them all round, each muttering his word of welcome, then Holt began: "We wish you to know, squoire, that we, none of us, ain't been comfortable in our minds here at Folking since that crawling villain Crinkett came and showed himself at our young squire's christening."

"That we ain't," said Timothy Purvidge, another Netherden farmer.

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"I haven't had much comfort since that day myself, Mr. Purvidge," said Caldigate,—"not till this morning."

"Nor yet haven't none of us," continued Mr. Holt, very impressively. "We knowed as you had done all right. We was as sure as the church tower. Lord love you, sir, when it was between our young missus,—who'll excuse me for noticing these bright colours, and for saying how glad I am to see her come out once again as our squire's wife should come out,—between her and that bedangled woman as I seed in the court, it didn't take no one long to know what was the truth!" The eloquence here was no doubt better than the argument, as Caldigate must have felt when he remembered how fond he had once been of that "bedangled woman." Hester, who, though she knew the whole story, did not at this moment join two and two together, thought that Mr. Holt put the case uncommonly well. "No! we knew," he continued, with a wave of his hand. "But the jury weren't Netherden men,—nor yet Utterden, Mr. Halfacre," he added, turning to a tenant from the other parish. "And they couldn't tell how it all was as we could. And there was that judge, who would have believed any miscreant as could be got anywhere, to swear away a man's liberty,—or his wife and family, which is a'most worse. We saw how it was to be when he first looked out of his eye at the two post-office gents, and others who spoke up for the young squoire. It was to be guilty. We know'd it. But it didn't any way change our minds. As to Crinkett and Smith and them others, we saw that they were ruffians. We never doubted that. But we saw as there was a bad time coming to you, Mr. John. Then we was unhappy; unhappy along

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of you, Mr. John,—but a'most worse as to this dear lady and the boy."

"My missus cried that you wouldn't have believed," said Mr. Purvidge. "'If that's true,' said my missus, 'she ain't nobody; and it's my belief she's as true a wife as ever stretched herself aside her husband.'" Then Hester bethought herself what present, of all presents, would be most acceptable to Mrs. Purvidge, who was a red-faced, red-armed, hard-working old woman, peculiarly famous for making cheeses.

"We all knew it," said Mr. Holt slapping his thigh with great energy. "And now, in spite of 'em all, judge, jury, and lying witnesses,—the king has got his own again." At this piece of triumphant rhetoric there was a cheer from all the farmers. "And so we have come to wish you all joy, and particularly you, ma'am, with your boy. Things have been said of you, ma'am, hard to bear no doubt. But not a word of the kind at Folking, nor yet in Netherden;—nor yet at Utterden, Mr. Halfacre. But all this is over, and we do hope that you, ma'am, and the young squoire 'll live long, and the young 'un of all long after we are gone to our rest,—and that you'll be as fond of Folking as Folking is of you. I can't say no fairer." Then the tray was brought in with wine, and everybody drank everybody's health, and there was another shaking of hands all round. Mr. Purvidge, it was observed, drank the health of every separate member of the family in a separate bumper, pressing the edge of the glass securely to his lips, and then sending the whole contents down his throat at one throw with a chuck from his little finger.

The two Caldigates went out to see their friends as far as the gate, and while they were still within the

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grounds there came a merry peal from the bells of Netherden church-tower. "I knew they'd be at it," said Mr. Holt.

"And quite right too," said Mr. Halfacre. "We'd rung over at Utterden, only we've got nothing but that little tinkling thing as is more fitter to swing round a bullock's neck than on a church top."

"I told 'em as they should. have beer," said Mr. Brownby, whose house stood on Folking Causeway, "and they shall have beer!" Mr. Brownby was a silent man, and added nothing to this one pertinent remark.

"As to beer," said Mr. Halfacre, "we'd 'ave found the beer at Utterden. There wouldn't have been no grudging the beer, Mr. Brownby, no more than there is in the lower parish; but you can't get up a peal merely on beer. You've got to have bells."

While they were still standing at the gate, Mr. Bromley the clergyman joined them, and walked back towards the house with the two Caldigates. He, too, had come to offer his congratulations, and to assure the released prisoner that he never believed the imputed guilt. But he would not go into the house, surmising that on such a day the happy wife would not care to see many visitors. But Caldigate asked him to take a turn about the grounds, being anxious to learn something from the outside world. "What do they say to it all at Babington?"

"I think they're a little divided."

"My aunt has been against me of course."

"At first she was, I fancy. It was natural that people should believe till Shand came back."

"Poor, dear old Dick. I must look after Dick. What about Julia?"

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"Spretæ injuria formæ!" said Mr. Bromley. "What were you to expect?"

"I will forgive her. And Mr. Smirkie? I don't think Smirkie ever looked on me with favourable eyes."

Then the clergyman was forced to own that Smirkie too had been among those who had believed the woman's story. "But you have to remember how natural it is that a man should think a verdict to be right. In our country a wrong verdict is an uncommon occurrence. It requires close personal acquaintance and much personal confidence to justify a man in supposing that twelve jurymen should come to an erroneous decision. I thought that they were wrong. But still I knew that I could hardly defend my opinion before the outside world."

"It is all true," said Caldigate; "and I have made up my mind that I will be angry with no one who will begin to believe me innocent from this day."

His mind, however, was considerably exercised in regard to the Boltons, as to whom he feared that they would not even yet allow themselves to be convinced. For his wife's happiness their conversion was of infinitely more importance than that of all the outside world beyond. When the gloom of the evening had come, she too came out and walked with him about the garden and grounds with the professed object of showing him whatever little changes might have been made. But the conversation soon fell back upon the last great incident of their joint lives.

"But your mother cannot refuse to believe what everybody now declares to be true," he argued.

"Mamma is so strong in her feelings."

"She must know they would not have let me out

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of prison in opposition to the verdict until they were very sure of what they were doing."

Then she told him all that had occurred between her and her mother since the trial,—how her mother had come out to Folking and had implored her to return to Chesterton, and had then taken herself away in dudgeon because she had not prevailed. "But nothing,—nothing would have made me leave the place," she said, "after what they tried to do when I was there before. Except to go to church, I have not once been outside the gate."

"Your brothers will come round, I suppose. Robert has been very angry with me, I know. But he is a man of the world and a man of sense."

"We must take it as it will come, John. Of course it would be very much to me to have my father and mother restored to me. It would be very much to know that my brothers were again my friends. But when I remember how I prayed yesterday but for one thing, and that now, to-day, that one thing has come to me;—how I have got that which, when I waked this morning, seemed to me to be all the world to me, the want of which made my heart so sick that even my baby could not make me glad, I feel that nothing ought now to make me unhappy. I have got you, John, and everything else is nothing." As he stooped in the dark to kiss her again among the rose-bushes, he felt that it was almost worth his while to have been in prison.

After dinner there came a message to them across the ferry from Mr. Holt. Would they be so good as to walk down to the edge of the great dike, opposite to Twopenny Farm, at nine o'clock? As a part of the message, Mr. Holt sent word that at that hour the

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moon would be rising. Of course they went down to the dike,—Mr. Caldigate,—John Caldigate, and Hester; —and there, outside Mr. Holt's farmyard, just far enough to avoid danger to the hay-ricks and corn-stacks, there was blazing an enormous bonfire. All the rotten timber about the place and two or three tar-barrels had been got together, and there were collected all the inhabitants of the two parishes. The figures of the boys and girls and of the slow rustics with their wives could be seen moving about indistinctly across the water by the fluttering flame of the bonfire. And their own figures, too, were observed in the moonlight, and John Caldigate was welcomed back to his home by a loud cheer from all his neighbours.

"I did not see much of it myself," Mr. Holt said afterwards, "because me and my missus was busy among the stacks all the time, looking after the sparks. The bonfire might 'a' been too big, you know."

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CHAPTER XXXI

HOW MRS. BOLTON WAS QUITE CONQUERED

NEARLY a week passed over their heads at Puritan Grange before anything further was either done or said, or even written, as to the return of John Caldigate to his own home and to his own wife. In the meantime, both Mrs. Robert and Mrs. Daniel had gone out to Folking and made visits of ceremony,—visits which were intended to signify their acknowledgment that Mrs. John Caldigate was Mrs. John Caldigate. With Mrs. Daniel the matter was quite ceremonious and short. Mrs. Robert suggested something as to a visit into Cambridge, saying that her husband would be delighted if Hester and Mr. Caldigate would come and dine and sleep. Hester immediately felt that something had been gained, but she declined the proposed visit for the present. "We have both of us," she said, "gone through so much that we are not quite fit to go out anywhere yet." Mrs. Robert had hardly expected them to come, but she had observed her husband's behests. So far there had been a family reconciliation during the first few days after the prisoner's release; but no sign came from Mrs. Bolton; and Mr. Bolton, though he had given his orders, was not at first urgent in requiring obedience to them. Then she received a letter from Hester.

"DEAREST, DEAREST MAMMA,—Of course you know that my darling husband has come back to me. All I want now to make me quite happy is to have you once

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again as my own, own mother. Will you not send me a line to say that it shall all be as though these last long dreary months had never been;—so that I may go to you and show you my baby once again? And, dear mamma, say one word to me to let me know that you know that he is my husband. Tell papa to say so also.—Your most affectionate daughter,

"HESTER CALDIGATE."

Mrs. Bolton found this letter on the breakfast-table, lying, as was usual with her letters, close to her plate, and she read it without saying a word to her husband. Then she put it in her pocket, and still did not say a word. Before the middle of the day she had almost made up her mind that she would keep the letter entirely to herself. It was well, she thought, that he had not seen it, and no good could be done by showing it to him. But he had been in the breakfast-parlour before her, had seen the envelope, and had recognised the handwriting. They were sitting together after lunch, and she was just about to open the book of sermons with which, at that time, she was regaling him, when he stopped her with a question. "What did Hester say in her letter?"

Even those who intend to be truthful are sometimes surprised into a lie. "What letter?" she said. But she remembered herself at once, and knew that she could not afford to be detected in a falsehood. "That note from Hester? Yes;—I had a note this morning."

"I know you had a note. What does she say?"

"She tells me that he—he has come back."

"And what else? She was well aware that we knew that without telling us."

"She wants to come here."

"Bid her come."

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"Of course she shall come."

"And him." To this she made no answer, except with the muscles of her face, which involuntarily showed her antagonism to the order she had received. "Bid her bring her husband with her," said the banker.

"He would not come,—though I were to ask him."

"Then let it be on his own head."

"I will not ask him," she said at last, looking away across the room at the blank wall. "I will not belie my own heart. I do not want to see him here. He has so far got the better of me; but I will not put my neck beneath his feet for him to tread on me."

Then there was pause;—not that he intended to allow her disobedience to pass, but that he was driven to bethink himself how he might best oppose her. "Woman," he said, "you can neither forgive nor forget."

"He has got my child from me,—my only child."

"Does he persecute your child? Is she not happy in his love? Even if he have trespassed against you, who are you that you should not forgive a trespass? I say that he shall be asked to come here, that men may know that in her own father's house she is regarded as his true and honest wife."

"Men!" she murmured. "That men may know!" But she did not again tell him that she would not obey his command.

She sat all the remainder of the day alone in her room, hardly touching the work which she had beside her, not opening the book which lay by her hand on the table. She was thinking of the letter which she knew that she must write, but she did not rise to get pen and ink, nor did she even propose to herself that the letter should be written then. Not a word was said

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about it all the evening. On the next morning the banker pronounced his intention of going into town, but before he started he referred to the order he had given. "Have you written to Hester?" he asked. She merely shook her head. "Then write to-day." So saying, he tottered down the steps with his stick and got into the fly.

About noon she did get her paper and ink, and very slowly wrote her letter. Though her heart was, in truth, yearning towards her daughter,—though at that moment she could have made any possible sacrifice for her child had her child been apart from the man she hated,—she could not in her sullenness force her words into a form of affection.

"DEAR HESTER," she said. "Of course I shall be glad to see you and your boy. On what day would it suit you to come, and how long would you like to stay? I fear you will find me and your father but dull companions after the life you are now used to. If Mr. Caldigate would like to come with you, your father bids me say that he will be glad to see him.—Your loving mother, "MARY BOLTON."

She endeavoured, in writing her letter, to obey the commands that had been left with her, but she could not go nearer to it than this. She could not so far belie her heart as to tell her daughter that she herself would be glad to see the man. Then it took her long to write the address. She did write it at last;

MRS. JOHN CALDIGATE,
FOLKING.

But as she wrote it she told herself that she believed it to be a lie.

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When that letter reached Hester there was a consultation over it, to which old Mr. Caldigate was admitted. It was acknowledged on all sides that anything would be better than a family quarrel. The spirit in which the invitation had been written was to be found in every word of it. There was not a word to show that Mrs. Bolton had herself accepted the decision to which everyone else had come in the matter;—everything, rather, to show that she had not done so. But, as the squire said, it does not do to inquire too closely into all people's inner beliefs. "If everybody were to say what he thinks about everybody, nobody would ever go to see anybody." It was soon decided that Hester, with her baby, should go on an early day to Puritan Grange, and should stay there for a couple of nights. But there was a difficulty as to Caldigate himself. He was naturally enough anxious to send Hester without him, but she was as anxious to take him. "It isn't for my own sake," she said,—"because I should like to have you there with me. Of course it will be very dull for you, but it will be so much better that we should all be reconciled, and that everyone should know that we are so."

"It would only be a pretence," said he.

"People must pretend sometimes, John," she answered. At last it was decided that he should take her, reaching the place about the hour of lunch, so that he might again break bread in her father's house,—that he should then leave her there, and that at the end of the two days she should return to Folking.

On the day named they reached Puritan Grange at the hour fixed. Both Caldigate and Hester were very nervous as to their reception, and got out of the carriage almost without a word to each other. The old

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gardener, who had been so busy during Hester's imprisonment, was there to take the luggage; and Hester's maid carried the child as Caldigate, with his wife behind him, walked up the steps and rang the bell. There was no coming out to meet them, no greeting them even in the hall. Mr. Bolton was perhaps too old and too infirm for such running out, and it was hardly within his nature to do so. They were shown into the well-known morning sitting-room, and there they found Hester's father in his chair, and Mrs. Bolton standing up to receive them.

Hester, after kissing her father, threw herself into her mother's arms before a word had been said to Caldigate. Then the banker addressed him with a set speech, which no doubt had been prepared in the old man's mind. "I am very glad," he said, "that you have brought this unhappy matter to so good a conclusion, Mr. Caldigate."

"It has been a great trouble,—worse almost for Hester than for me."

"Yes, it has been sad enough for Hester,—and the more so because it was natural that others should believe that which the jury and the judge declared to have been proved. How should anyone know otherwise?"

"Just so, Mr. Bolton. If they will accept the truth now, I shall be satisfied."

"It will come, but perhaps slowly to some folk. You should in justice remember that your own early follies have tended to bring this all about."

It was a grim welcome, and the last speech was one which Caldigate found it difficult to answer. It was so absolutely true that it admitted of no answer. He thought that it might have been spared, and

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shrugged his shoulders as though to say that that part of the subject was one which he did not care to discuss. Hester heard it, and quivered with anger even in her mother's arms. Mrs. Bolton heard it, and in the midst of her kisses made an inward protest against the word used. Follies indeed! Why had he not spoken out the truth as he knew it, and told the man of his vices?

But it was necessary that she too should address him. "I hope I see you quite well, Mr. Caldigate," she said, giving him her hand.

"The prison has not disagreed with me," he said, with an attempt at a smile, "though it was not an agreeable residence."

"If you used your leisure there to meditate on your soul's welfare, it may have been of service to you."

It was very grim. But the banker having made his one severe speech, became kind in his manner, and almost genial. He asked after his son-in-law's future intentions, and when he was told that they thought of spending some months abroad so as to rid themselves in that way of the immediate record of their past misery, he was gracious enough to express his approval of the plan; and then when the lunch was announced, and the two ladies had passed out of the room, he said a word to his son-in-law in private. "As I was convinced, Mr. Caldigate, when I first heard the evidence, that that other woman was your wife, and was therefore very anxious to separate my daughter from you, so am I satisfied now that the whole thing was a wicked plot."

"I am very glad to hear you say that, sir."

"Now, if you please, we will go in to lunch."

As long as Caldigate remained in the house Mrs.

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Bolton was almost silent. The duties of a hostess she performed in a stiff ungainly way. She asked him whether he would have hashed mutton or cold beef, and allowed him to pour a little sherry into her wine-glass. But beyond this there was not much conversation. Mr. Bolton had said what he had to say, and sat leaning forward with his chin over his plate perfectly silent. It is to be supposed that he had some pleasure in having his daughter once more beneath his roof, especially as he had implored his wife not to deprive him of that happiness during the small remainder of his days. But he sat there with no look of joy upon his face. That she should be stern, sullen, and black-browed was to be expected. She had been compelled to entertain their guest; and was not at all the woman to bear such compulsion meekly.

The hour at last wore itself away, and the carriage which was to take Caldigate back to Folking was again at the door. It was a Tuesday. "You will send for me on Thursday," she said to him in a whisper.

"Certainly."

"Early? After breakfast, you know. I suppose you will not come yourself."

"Not here, I think. I have done all the good I can do, and it is pleasant to no one. But you shall pick me up in the town. I shall go in and see your brother Robert." Then he went, and Hester was left with her parents.

As she turned back from the hall-door she found her mother standing at the foot of the stairs, waiting for her. "Shall I come with you, mamma?" she said. Holding each other's arms they went up, and so passed into Hester's room, where the nurse was sitting with the boy. "Let her go into my room," said the elder

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lady. So the nurse took the baby away, and they were alone together. "Oh, Hester, Hester, my child," said the mother, flinging her arms wildly round her daughter.

The whole tenor of her face was changed at that moment. Even to Hester she had been stern, forbidding, and sullen. There had not been a gracious movement about her lips or eyes since the visitors had come. A stranger, could a stranger have seen it all, would have said that the mother did not love her child, that there was no touch of tenderness about the woman's heart. But now, when she was alone, with the one thing on earth that was dear to her, she melted at once. In a moment Hester found herself seated on the sofa, with her mother kneeling before her, sobbing and burying her face in the loved one's lap. "You love me, Hester,—still."

"Love you, mamma! You know I love you."

"Not as it used to be. I am nothing to you now. I can do nothing for you now. You turn away from me, because—because—because——"

"I have never turned away from you, mamma."

"Because I could not bear that you should be taken away from me and given to him."

"He is good, mamma. If you would only believe that he is good!"

"He is not good. God only is good, my child."

"He is good to me."

"Ah, yes;—he has taken you from me. When I thought you were coming back, in trouble, in disgrace from the world, nameless, a poor injured thing, with your nameless babe, then I comforted myself because I thought that I could be all and everything to you. I would have poured balm into the hurt wounds. I

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would have prayed with you, and you and I would have been as one before the Lord."

"You are not sorry, mamma, that I have got my husband again?"

"Oh I have tried,—I have tried not to be sorry."

"You do not believe now that that woman was his wife?"

Then the old colour came back upon her face, and something of the old look, and the tenderness was quenched in her eyes, and the softness of her voice was gone. "I do not know," she said.

"Mamma, you must know. Get up and sit by me till I tell you. You must teach yourself to know this,—to be quite sure of it. You must not think that your daughter is,—is living in adultery with the husband of another woman. To me who knew him there has never been a shadow of a doubt, not a taint of fear to darken the certainty of my faith. It could not have been so, perhaps, with you who have not known his nature. But now, now, when all of them, from the Queen downwards, have declared that this charge has been a libel, when even the miscreants themselves have told against themselves, when the very judge has gone back from the word in which he was so confident, shall my mother,—and my mother only,—think that I am a wretched, miserable, nameless outcast, with a poor nameless, fatherless baby? I am John Caldigate's wife before God's throne, and my child is his child, and his lawful heir, and owns his father's name. My husband is to me before all the world,—first, best, dearest,—my king, my man, my master, and my lover. Above all things, he is my husband." She had got up, and was standing before her mother with her arms folded before her breast, and the fire glanced from her

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eyes as she spoke. "But, mamma, because I love him more, I do not love you less."

"Oh yes, oh yes; so much less."

"No, mamma. It is given to us, of God, so to love our husband; 'For the husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church.' You would not have me forget such teaching as that?"

"No;—my child; no."

"When I went out and had him given to me for my husband, of course I loved him best. The Lord do so to me and more also if aught but death part him and me! But shall that make my mother think that her girl's heart is turned away from her? Mamma, say that he is my husband." The frown came back, and the woman sat silent and sullen, but there was something of vacillating indecision in her face. "Mamma," repeated Hester, "say that he is my husband."

"I suppose so," said the woman, very slowly.

"Mamma, say that it is so, and bless your child."

"God bless you, my child."

"And you know that it is so?"

"Yes." The word was hardly spoken, but the lips of the one were close to the ear of the other, and the sound was heard, and the assent was acknowledged.

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CHAPTER XXXII

CONCLUSION

THE web of our story has now been woven, the piece is finished, and it is only necessary that the loose threads should be collected, so that there may be no unravelling. In such chronicles as this, something no doubt might be left to the imagination without serious injury to the story; but the reader, I think, feels a deficiency when, through tedium or coldness, the writer omits to give all the information which he possesses.

Among the male personages of my story, Bagwax should perhaps be allowed to stand first. It was his energy and devotion to his peculiar duties which, after the verdict, served to keep alive the idea that that verdict had been unjust. It was through his ingenuity that Judge Bramber was induced to refer the inquiry back to Scotland Yard, and in this way to prevent the escape of Crinkett and Euphemia Smith. Therefore we will first say a word as to Bagwax and his history.

It was rumoured at the time that Sir John Joram and Mr. Brown, having met each other at the club after the order for Caldigate's release had been given, and discussing the matter with great interest, united in giving praise to Bagwax. Then Sir John told the story of those broken hopes, of the man's desire to travel, and of the faith and honesty with which he sacrificed his own aspirations for the good of the poor lady whose husband had been so cruelly taken away

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from her. Then,—as it was said at the time,—an important letter was sent from the Home Office to the Postmaster-General, giving Mr. Bagwax much praise, and suggesting that a very good thing would be done to the colony of New South Wales if that ingenious and skilful master of post-marks could be sent out to Sydney with the view of setting matters straight in the Sydney office.* There was then much correspondence with the Colonial Office, which did not at first care very much about Bagwax; but at last the order was given by the Treasury, and Bagwax went. There were many tears shed on the occasion at Apricot Villa. Jemima Curlydown thought that she also should be allowed to see Sydney, and was in favour of an immediate marriage with this object. But Bagwax felt that the boisterous ocean might be unpropitious to the delights of a honeymoon; and Mr. Curlydown reminded his daughter of all the furniture which would thus be lost. Bagwax went as a gay bachelor, and spent six happy months in the bright colony. He did not effect much, as the delinquent who had served Crinkett in his base purposes had already been detected and punished before his arrival; but he was treated with extreme courtesy by the Sydney officials, and was able to bring home with him a treasure in the shape of a newly-discovered manner of tying mail-bags. So that when the "Sydney Intelligencer" boasted that the great English professor who had come to instruct them all had gone home instructed, there was some truth in it. He was married immediately after his return, and Jemima his wife has the advantage, in her very pretty

* I hope my friends in the Sydney post-office will take no offence should this story ever reach their ears. I know how well the duties are done in that office, and, between ourselves, I think that Mr. Bagwax's journey was quite unnecessary.

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drawing-room, of every shilling that he made by the voyage. My readers will be glad to hear that soon afterwards he was appointed Inspector-General of Post-marks to the great satisfaction of all the post-office.

One of the few things which Caldigate did before he took his wife abroad was to "look after Dick Shand." It was manifest to all concerned that Dick could do no good in England. His yellow trousers and the manners which accompanied them were not generally acceptable in merchant's offices and such like places. He knew nothing about English farming, which, for those who have not learned the work early, is an expensive amusement rather than a trade by which bread can be earned. There seemed to be hardly a hope for Dick in England. But he had done some good among the South Sea Islanders. He knew their ways and could manage them. He was sent out, therefore, with a small capital to be junior partner on a sugar estate in Queensland. It need hardly be said that the small capital was lent to him by John Caldigate. There he took steadily to work, and it is hoped by his friends that he will soon begin to repay the loan.

The uncle, aunt, and cousins at Babington soon renewed their intimacy with John Caldigate, and became intimate with Hester. The old squire still turned up his nose at them, as he had done all his life, calling them Bœotians, and reminding his son that Suffolk had ever been a silly country. But the Babingtons, one and all, knew this, and had no objection to be accounted thick-headed as long as they were acknowledged to be prosperous, happy, and comfortable. It had always been considered at Babington that young Caldigate was brighter and more clever than themselves; and yet

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he had been popular with them as a cousin of whom they ought to be proud. He was soon restored to his former favour, and after his return from the Continent spent a fortnight at the Hall, with his wife, very comfortably. Julia, indeed, was not there, nor Mr. Smirkie. Among all their neighbours and acquaintances Mr. Smirkie was the last to drop the idea that there must have been something in that story of an Australian marriage. His theory of the law on the subject was still incorrect. The Queen's pardon, he said, could not do away with the verdict, and therefore he doubted whether the couple could be regarded as man and wife. He was very anxious that they should be married again, and with great good-nature offered to perform the ceremony himself either at Plum-cum-Pippins or even in the drawing-room at Folking.

"Suffolk to the very backbone!" was the remark of the Cambridgeshire squire when he heard of this very kind offer. But even he at last came round, under his wife's persuasion, when he found that the paternal mansion was likely to be shut against him unless he yielded.

Hester's second tour with her husband was postponed for some weeks, because it was necessary that her husband should appear as a witness against Crinkett and Euphemia Smith. They were tried also at Cambridge, but not before Judge Bramber. The woman never yielded an inch. When she found how it was going with her, she made fast her money, and with infinite pluck resolved that she would endure with patience whatever might be in store for her, and wait for better times. When put into the dock she pleaded not guilty with a voice that was audible only to the jailer standing beside her, and after that did not open

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her mouth during the trial. Crinkett made a great effort to be admitted as an additional witness against his comrade, but, having failed in that, pleaded guilty at last. He felt that there was no hope for him with such a weight of evidence against him, and calculated that his punishment might thus be lighter, and that he would save himself the cost of an expensive defence. In the former hope he was deceived, as the two were condemned to the same term of imprisonment. When the woman heard that she was to be confined for three years with hard labour her spirit was almost broken. But she made no outward sign; and as she was led away out of the dock she looked round for Caldigate, to wither him with the last glance of her reproach. But Caldigate, who had not beheld her misery without some pang at his heart, had already left the court.

Judge Bramber never opened his mouth upon the matter to a single human being. He was a man who, in the bosom of his family, did not say much about the daily work of his life, and who had but few friends sufficiently intimate to be trusted with his judicial feelings. The Secretary of State was enabled to triumph in the correctness of his decision, but it may be a question whether Judge Bramber enjoyed the triumph. The matter had gone luckily for the Secretary; but how would it have been had Crinkett and the woman been acquitted?—how would it have been had Caldigate broken down in his evidence, and been forced to admit that there had been a marriage of some kind? No doubt the accusation had been false. No doubt the verdict had been erroneous. But the man had brought it upon himself by his own egregious folly, and would have had no just cause for complaint had he been kept in prison till the second case had been

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tried. It was thus that Judge Bramber regarded the matter;—but he said not a word about it to anyone.

When the second trial was over, Caldigate and his wife started for Paris, but stayed a few days on their way with William Bolton in London. He and his wife were quite ready to receive Hester and her husband with open arms. "I tell you fairly," said he to Caldigate, "that when there was a doubt, I thought it better that you and Hester should be apart. You would have thought the same had she been your sister. Now I am only too happy to congratulate both of you that the truth has been brought to light."

On their return Mrs. Robert Bolton was very friendly,—and Robert Bolton himself was at last brought round to acknowledge that his convictions had been wrong. But there was still much that stuck in his throat. "Why did John Caldigate pay twenty thousand pounds to those persons when he knew that they had hatched a conspiracy against himself?" This question he asked his brother William over and over again, and never could be satisfied with any answer which his brother could give him.

Once he asked the question of Caldigate himself. "Because I felt that, in honour, I owed it to them," said Caldigate; "and, perhaps, a little too because I felt that, if they took themselves off at once, your sister might be spared something of the pain which she has suffered." But still it was unintelligible to Robert Bolton that any man in his senses should give away so large a sum of money with so slight a prospect of any substantial return.

Hester often goes to see her mother, but Mrs. Bolton has never been at Folking, and probably never will again visit that house. She is a woman whose heart

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is not capable of many changes, and who cannot readily give herself to new affections. But having once owned that John Caldigate is her daughter's husband, she now alleges no further doubt on the matter. She writes the words "Mrs. John Caldigate" without a struggle, and does take delight in her daughter's visits.

When last I heard from Folking, Mrs. John Caldigate's second boy had just been born.

THE END

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